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Rogson

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(54) **USER-CONTROLLABLE TELEPHONE CALL PROCESSING**

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- (72) Inventor: **Ariel S. Rogson**, Portland, OR (US)
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- Related U.S. Application Data**
- (63) Continuation of application No. 12/843,698, filed on Jul. 26, 2010, now Pat. No. 8,526,936, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 12/566,033, filed on Sep. 24, 2009, now Pat. No. 8,467,776.
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H04M 3/42 (2006.01)
H04W 4/16 (2009.01)
- (52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **H04W 4/16** (2013.01)
- (58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC H04M 1/006; H04M 1/57; H04M 1/663; H04M 3/38; H04M 15/06; H04M 2203/2072; H04M 3/436; H04M 3/533; H04L 12/6418
USPC 455/404.1, 419, 422.1, 418, 456.1, 455/412.1–414.2, 415; 379/201.02, 201.06, 379/93.02, 215.01, 93.03, 93.04, 201.07, 379/201.08

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Embodiments of the invention include a set of rules established by a third-party to control the execution of various functions offered by a device. The set of rules can block a function outright, or can specify particular combinations of days and times when the function can be executed and when it is blocked. Then, when the user of the device requests an instance of the function to be executed, the set of rules can be accessed to determine whether the requested function instance is permitted, after which the device can either block or execute the requested function instance.

See application file for complete search history.

21 Claims, 21 Drawing Sheets

Telephone ##	Time Interval	Instruction
503-555-1234	MTWThF 0800-1659	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input type="radio"/> Voicemail: 318 Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No 345
503-555-1234	MTWThF 0000-0759	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 1 327 Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No 351
503-555-1234	MTWThF 1700-2359	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 1 330 Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No 354
503-555-1234	SaSu 0000-2359	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 1 333 Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No 357
503-555-2345	MTWThFSaSu 0000-2359	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input checked="" type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input type="radio"/> Voicemail: 336 Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No 360
503-555-3456	MTWThF 0800-1659	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 2 348 Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No 363
⋮	⋮	⋮

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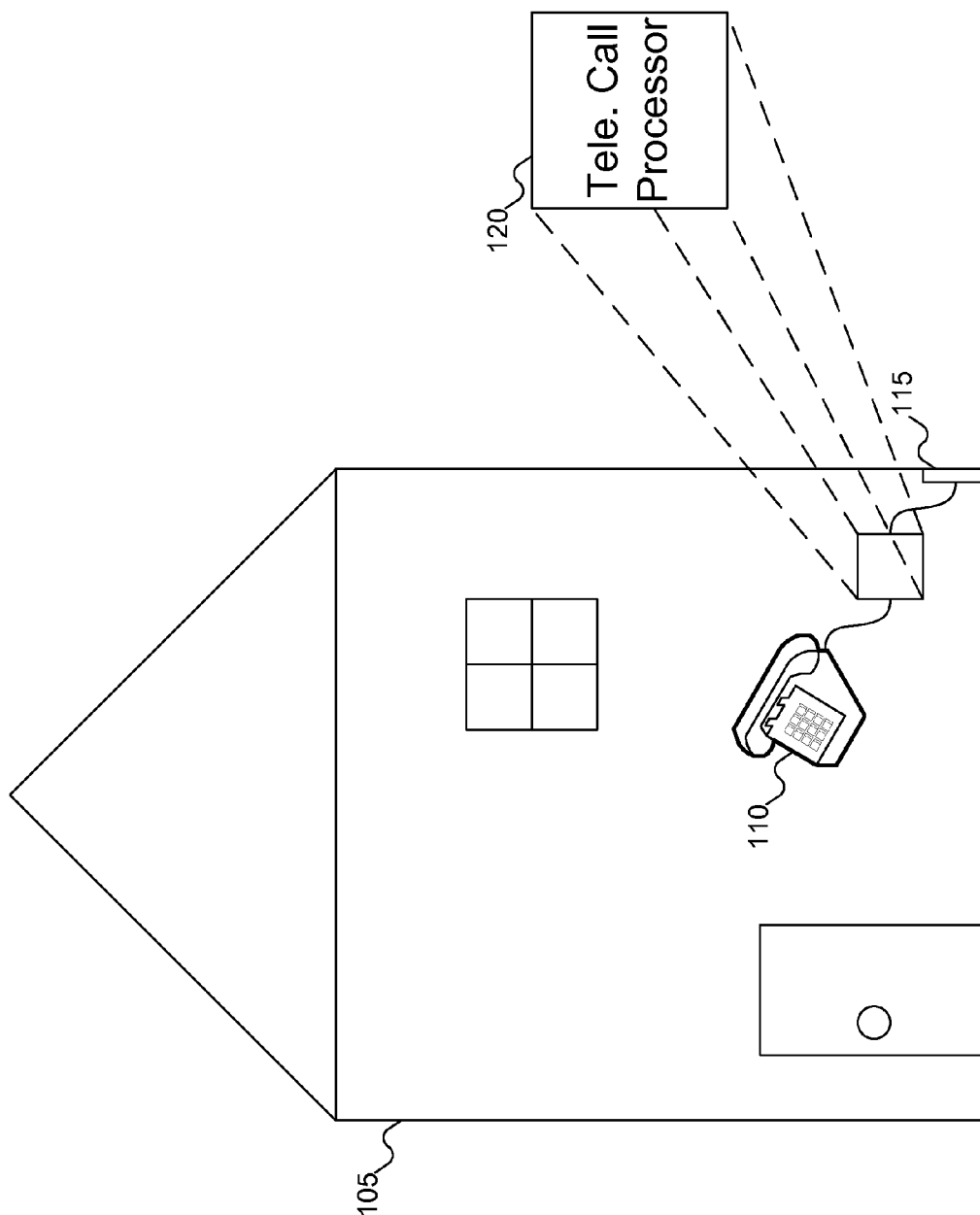


FIG. 1

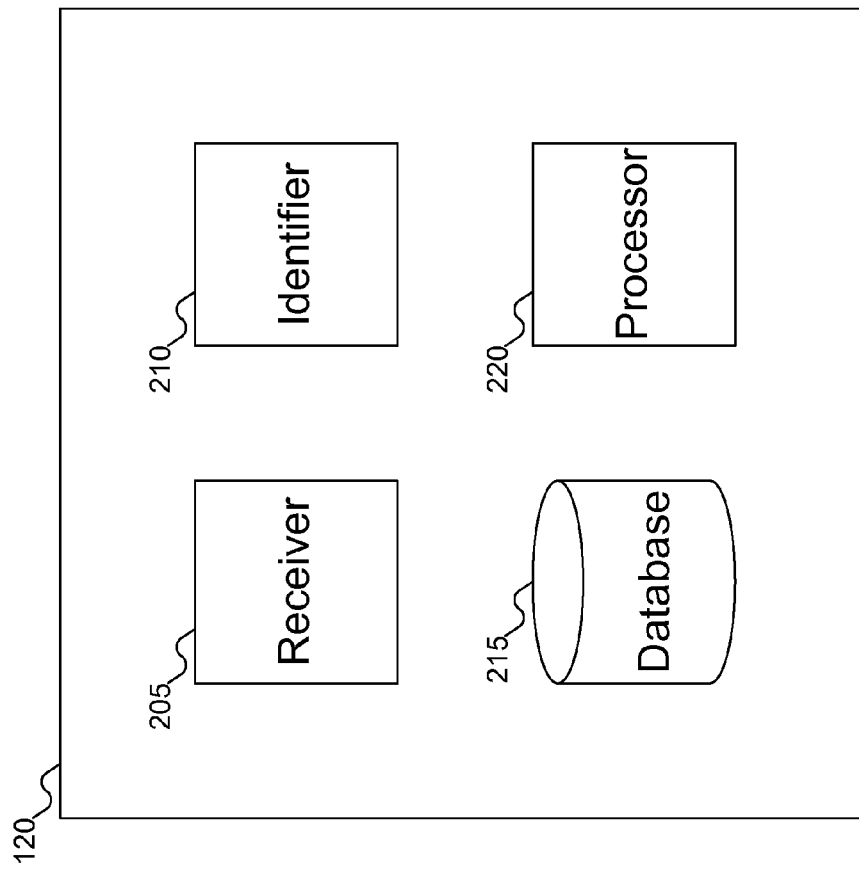


FIG. 2

215

Telephone ##	Time Interval	Instruction
503-555-1234 <u>303</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>312</u>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input type="radio"/> Voicemail: <u>315</u>
		Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>345</u>
503-555-1234 <u>303</u>	MTWThF 0000-0759 <u>318</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 1 <u>327</u>
		Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>351</u>
503-555-1234 <u>303</u>	MTWThF 1700-2359 <u>321</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 1 <u>330</u>
		Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>354</u>
503-555-1234 <u>303</u>	SaSu 0000-2359 <u>324</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 1 <u>333</u>
		Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>357</u>
503-555-2345 <u>306</u>	MTWThFSaSu 0000-2359 <u>339</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input checked="" type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input type="radio"/> Voicemail: <u>336</u>
		Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>360</u>
503-555-3456 <u>309</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>342</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 2 <u>348</u>
		Override: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <u>363</u>
⋮	⋮	⋮

FIG. 3

215

Telephone ##	Time Interval	Instruction
Default <u>405</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>410</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 2 <u>415</u> Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>450</u>
Default <u>405</u>	MTWThF 0000-0759 <u>420</u>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input type="radio"/> Voicemail: <u>435</u> Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>455</u>
Default <u>405</u>	MTWThF 1700-2359 <u>425</u>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input type="radio"/> Voicemail: <u>440</u> Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>460</u>
Default <u>405</u>	SaSu 0000-2359 <u>430</u>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input type="radio"/> Voicemail: <u>445</u> Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>465</u>
⋮	⋮	⋮

FIG. 4

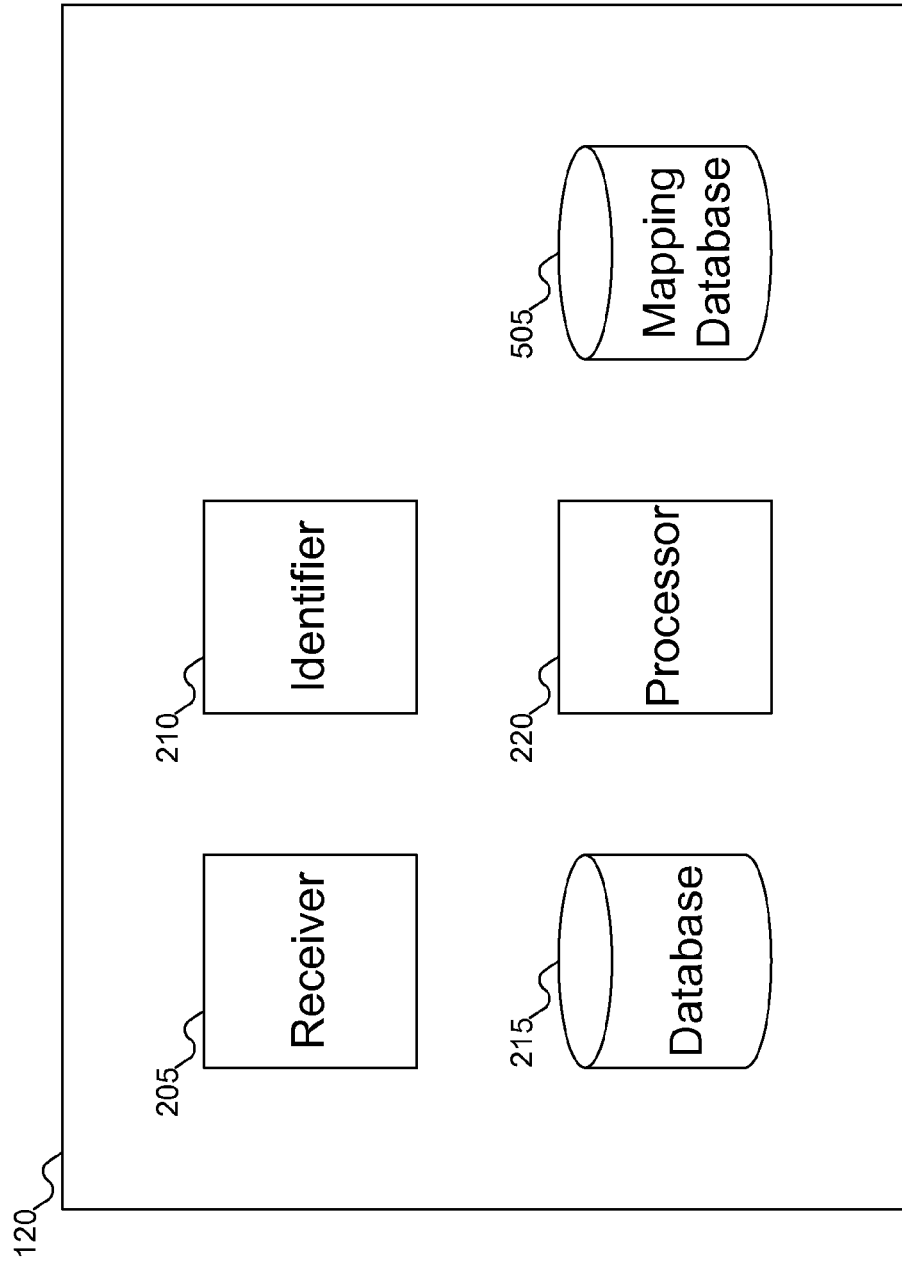


FIG. 5

505

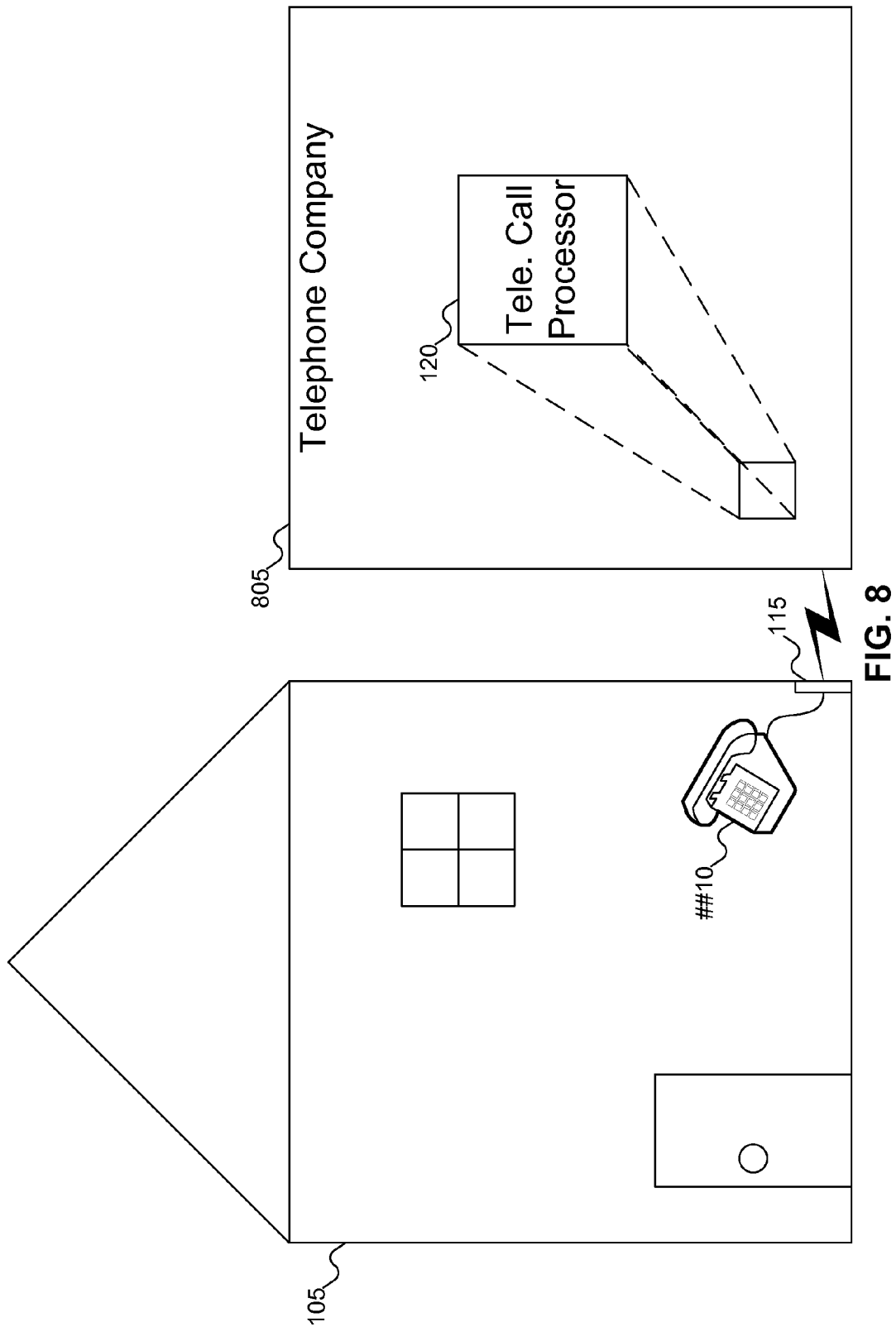
Telephone ##	Caller Name	Caller Group
503-555-1234 <u>303</u>	John Doe <u>605</u>	Business <u>620</u>
503-555-2345 <u>306</u>		Telemarketer <u>625</u>
503-555-3456 <u>309</u>	Mary Smith <u>615</u>	Personal <u>630</u>
503-555-4567 <u>610</u>	Mary Smith <u>615</u>	Personal <u>630</u>
⋮	⋮	⋮

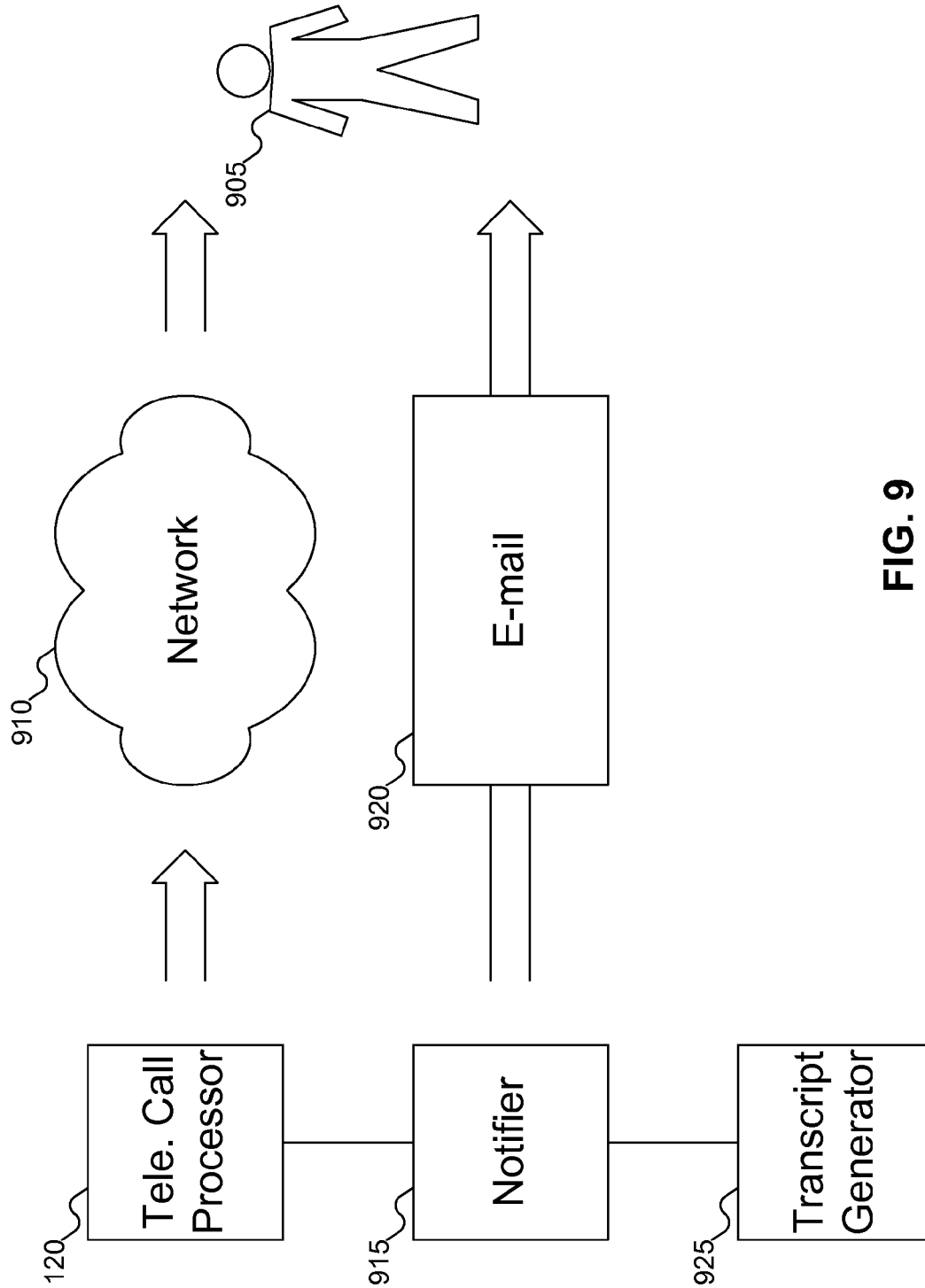
FIG. 6

215

Caller	Time Interval	Instruction
Business <u>620</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>312</u>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input type="radio"/> Voicemail: <u>315</u>
		Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>345</u>
Business <u>620</u>	MTWThF 0000-0759 <u>318</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 1 <u>327</u>
		Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>351</u>
Business <u>620</u>	MTWThF 1700-2359 <u>321</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 1 <u>330</u>
		Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>354</u>
Business <u>620</u>	SaSu 0000-2359 <u>324</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 1 <u>333</u>
		Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>357</u>
Telemarketer <u>615</u>	MTWThFSaSu 0000-2359 <u>339</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input checked="" type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input type="radio"/> Voicemail: <u>336</u>
		Override: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <u>360</u>
Mary Smith <u>615</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>342</u>	<input type="radio"/> Ring <input type="radio"/> Block <input type="radio"/> Forward: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Voicemail: 2 <u>348</u>
		Override: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <u>363</u>
⋮	⋮	⋮

FIG. 7





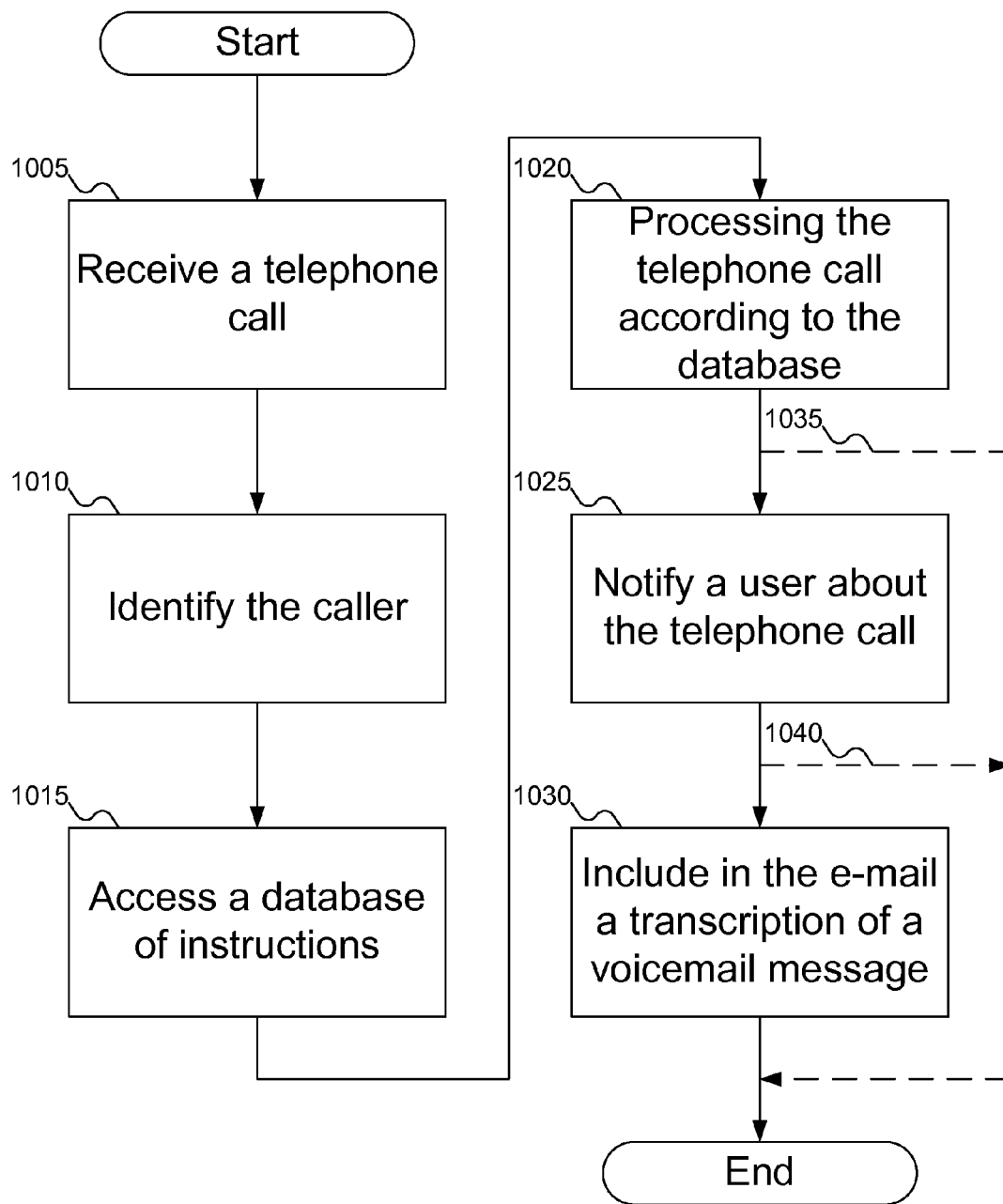


FIG. 10

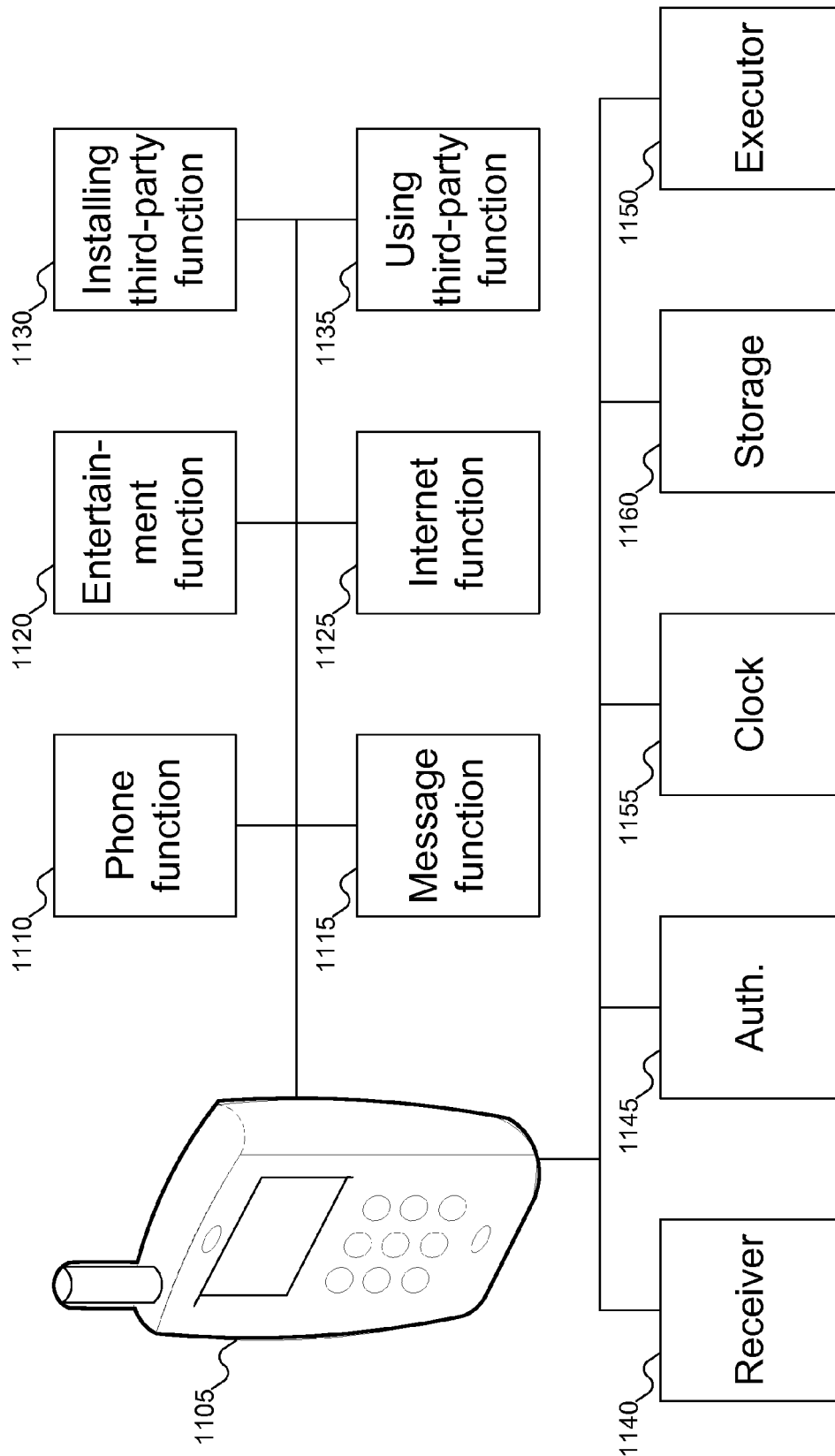


FIG. 11

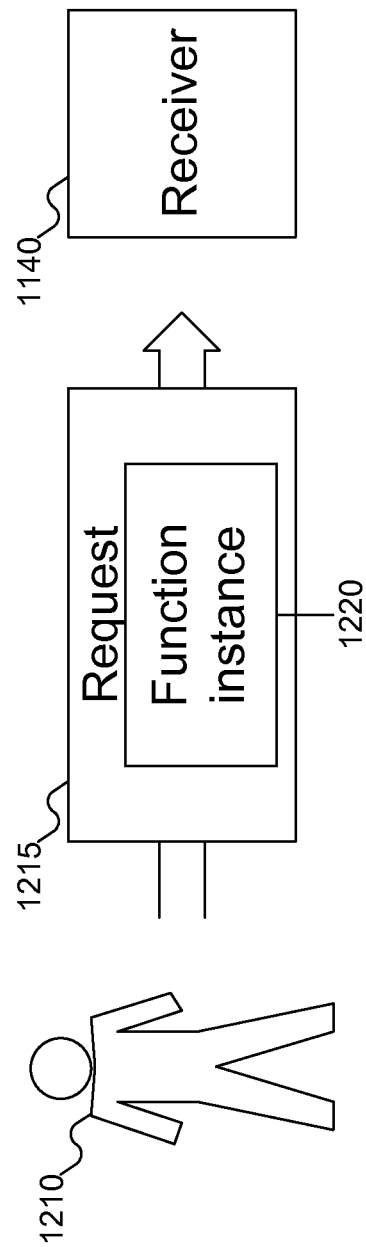


FIG. 12

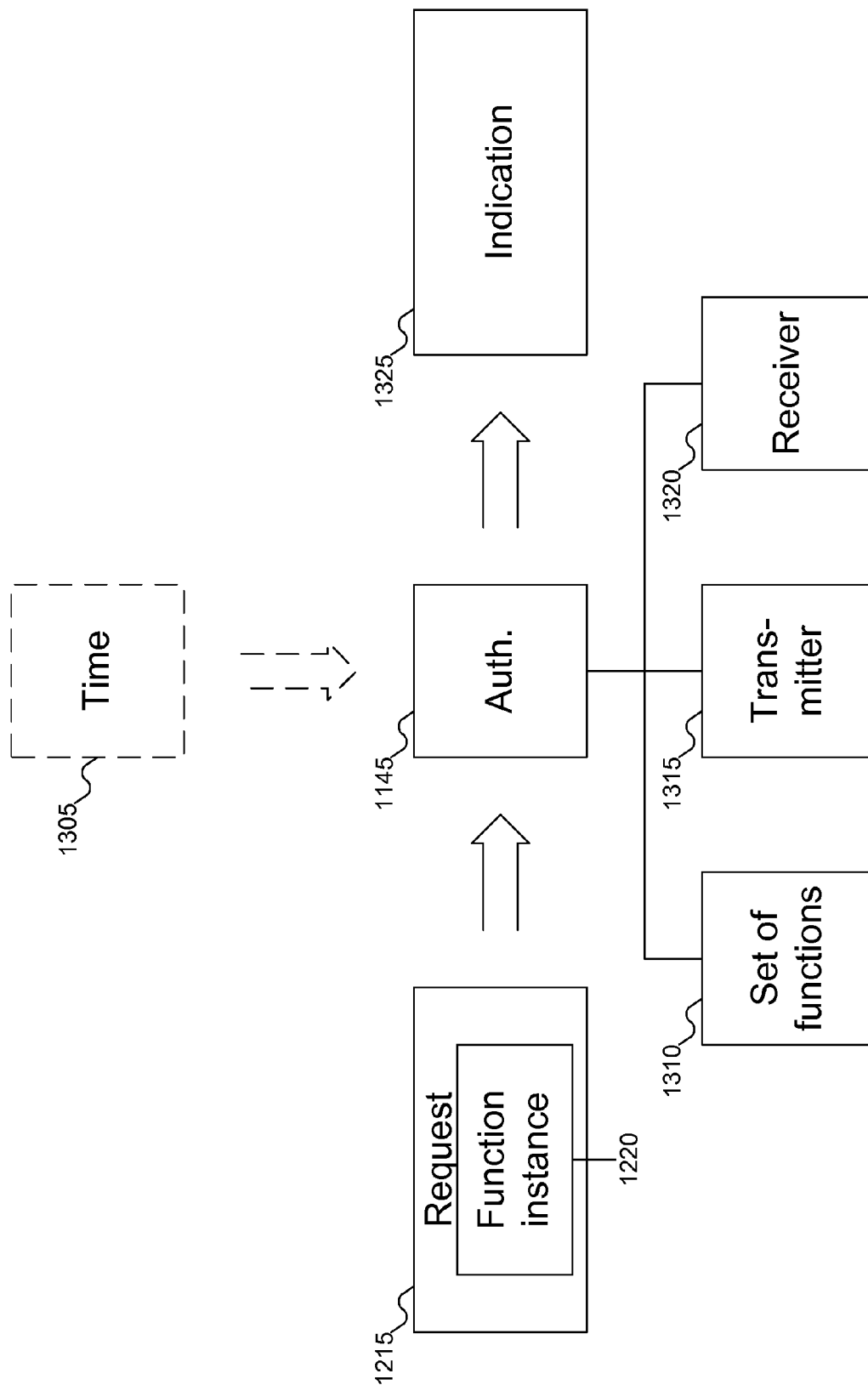


FIG. 13

1310

Function	Time Interval	Override
Phone function (Receiving) <u>1405</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>1410</u>	503-555-9876 503-555-8765 503-555-7654 <u>1465</u>
Phone function (Sending) <u>1415</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>1420</u>	503-555-9876 503-555-8765 503-555-7654 <u>1470</u>
Message function (Receiving) <u>1425</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>1430</u>	jdoe1@q.com jdoe2@q.com
Message function (Sending) <u>1435</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>1440</u>	jdoe1@q.com jdoe2@q.com <u>1480</u>
Internet function <u>1445</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>1450</u>	
Third-party function 1 <u>1455</u>	MTWThF 0800-1659 <u>1460</u>	
⋮	⋮	⋮

FIG. 14

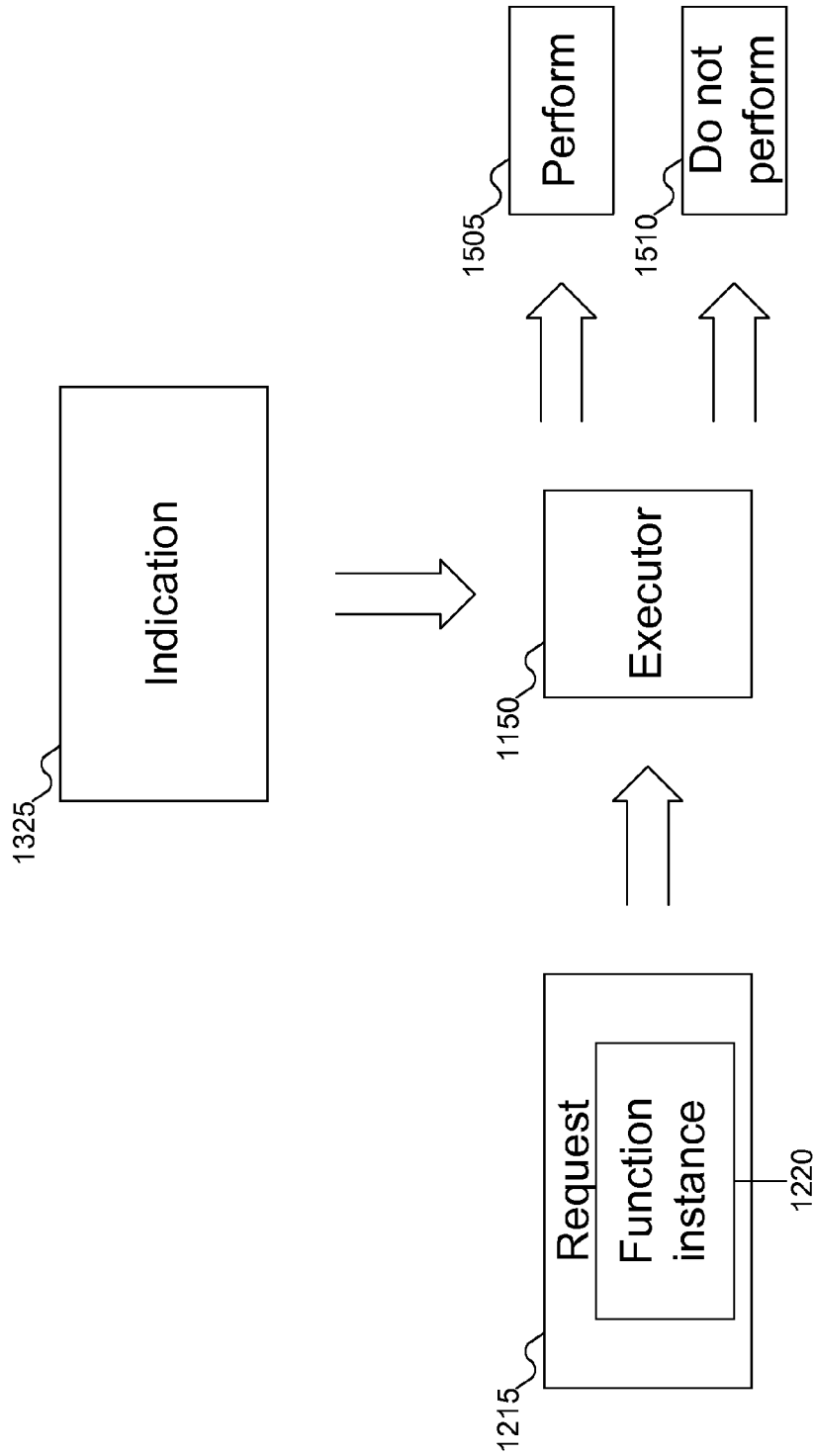


FIG. 15

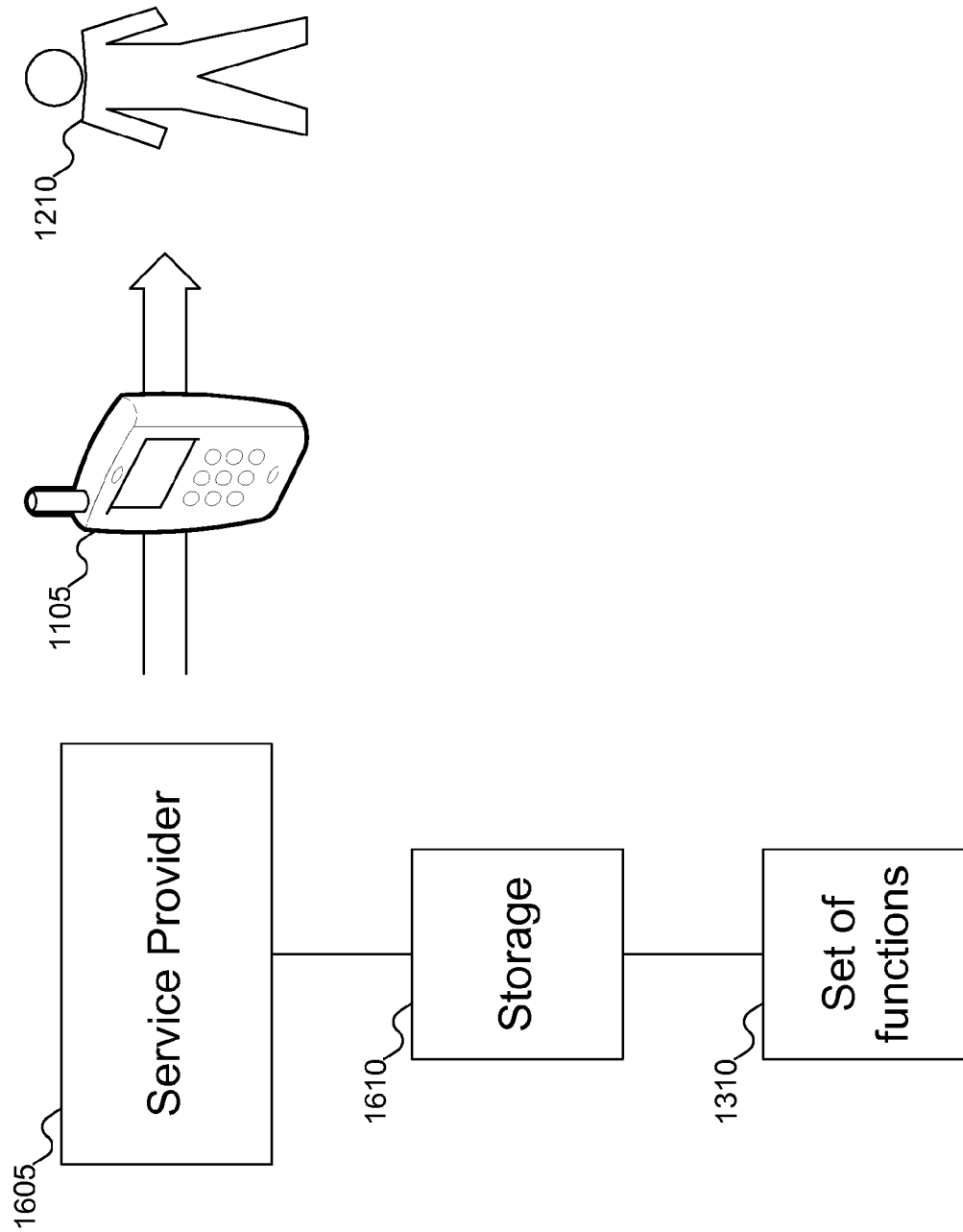


FIG. 16

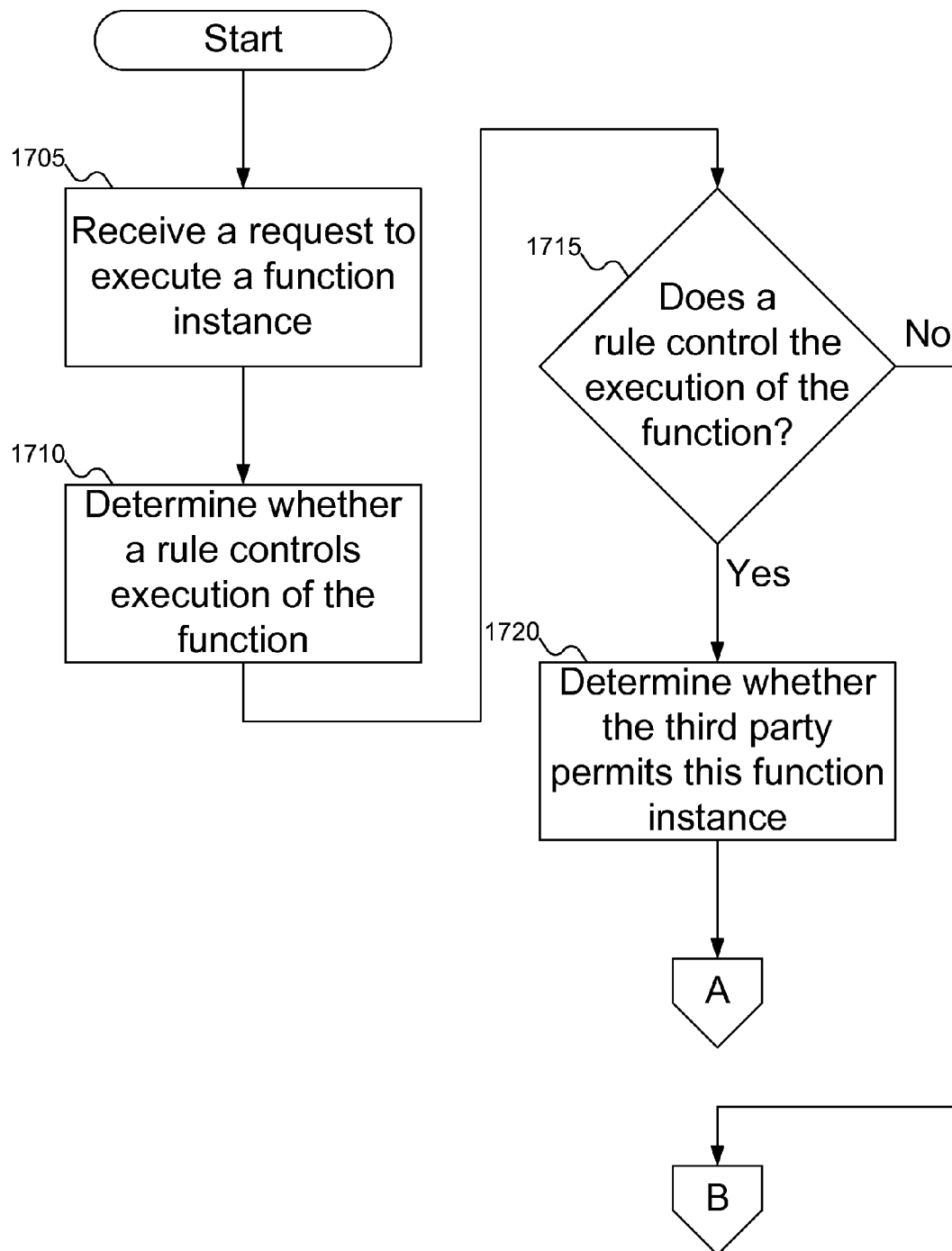


FIG. 17A

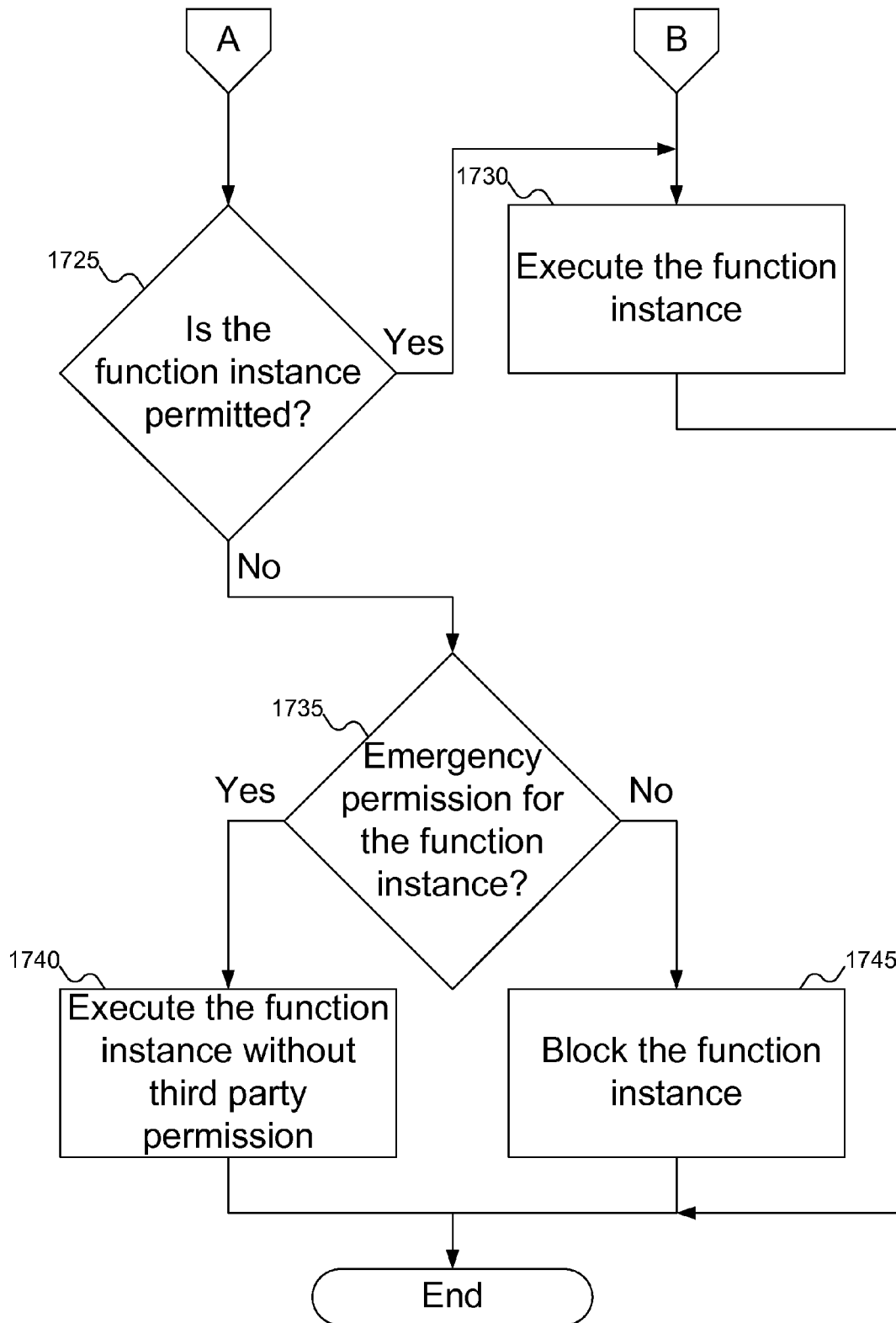


FIG. 17B

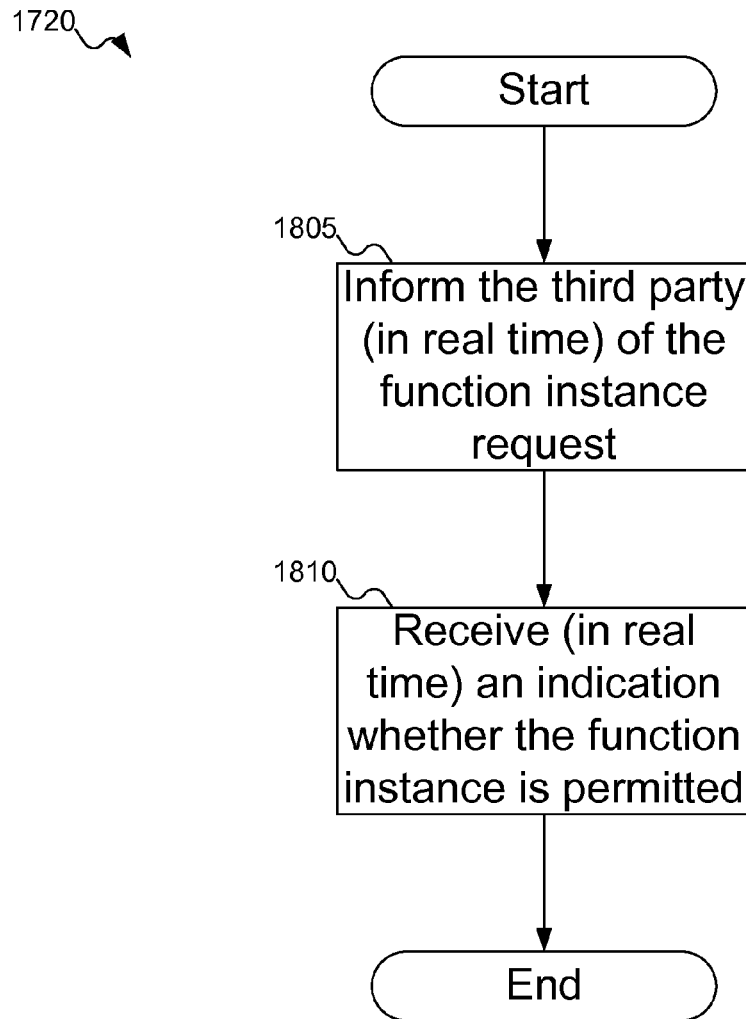


FIG. 18

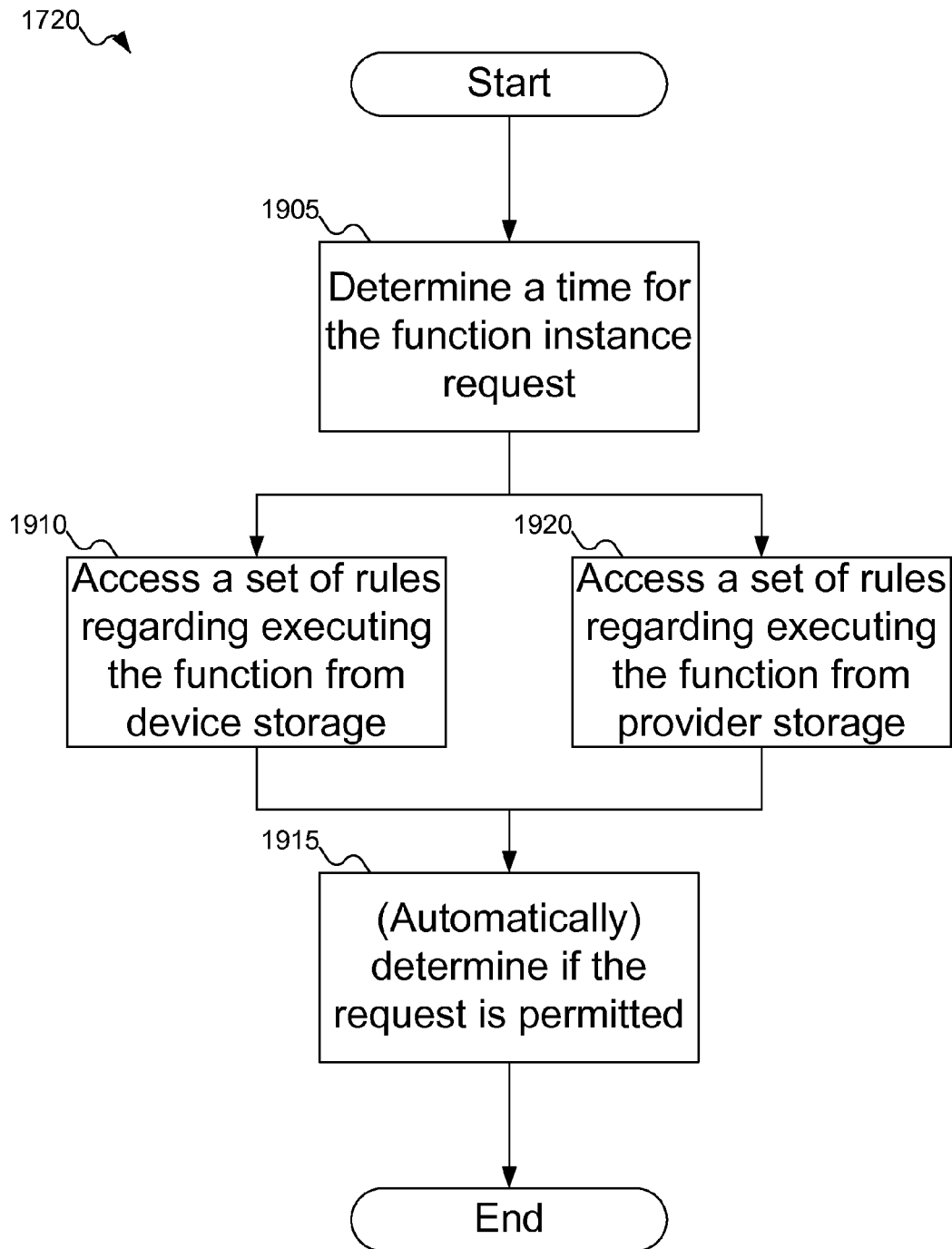


FIG. 19

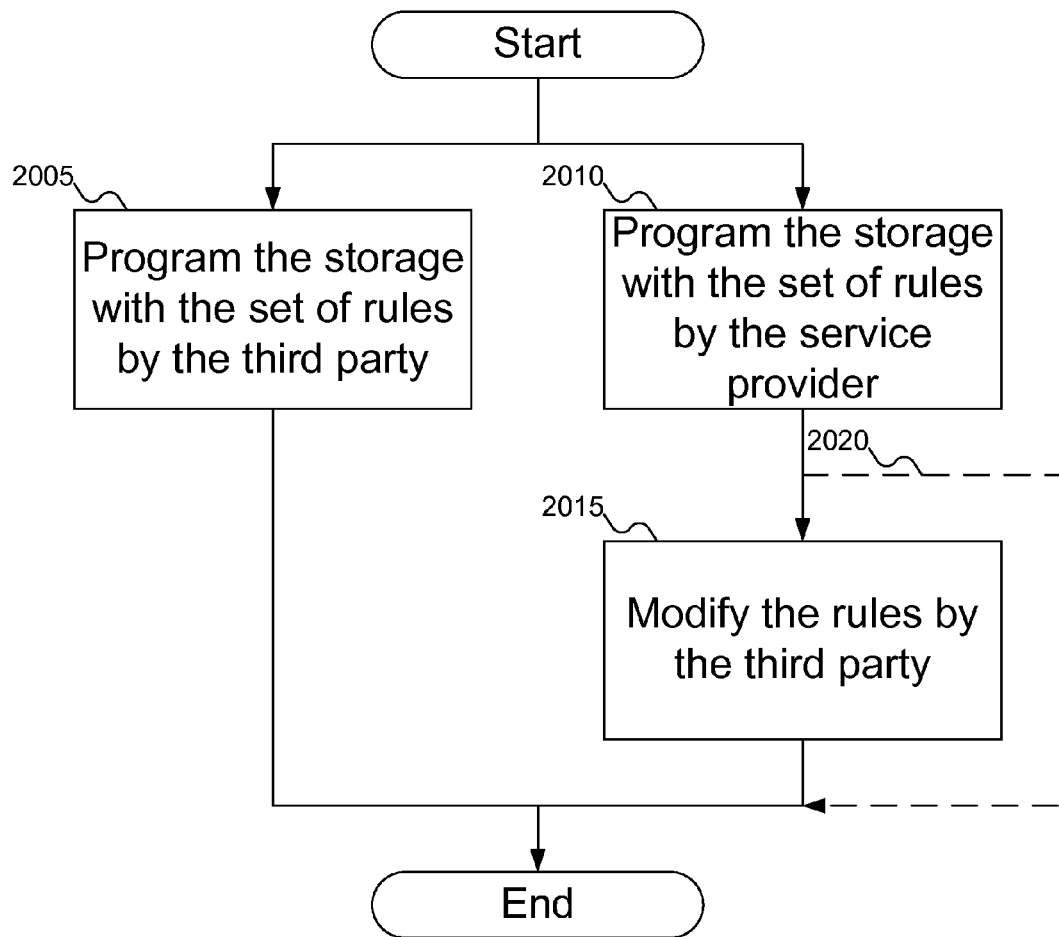


FIG. 20

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USER-CONTROLLABLE TELEPHONE CALL PROCESSING

RELATED APPLICATION DATA

This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/843,698, titled "LIMITING DEVICE OPERATION WITHOUT THIRD PARTY PERMISSION", filed Jul. 26, 2010, now allowed, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/566,033, titled "User-Controllable Telephone Call Processing", filed Sep. 24, 2009, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,467,776, issued Jun. 18, 2013, both of which are herein incorporated by reference for all purposes.

FIELD

This invention pertains to the operation of electronic devices, and more particularly to third-party control of the operation of mobile devices, such as cellular telephones and smart phones.

BACKGROUND

In a relatively short span of time, the cellular telephone has completely penetrated society. Whereas once only business-people could afford cellular telephones, which were bricks weighing several pounds, more than a foot in length, and costing several thousand dollars, today almost everyone has a cellular telephone. Even children have cellular telephones, some at relatively young ages.

And technology has also progressed, enabling users to do more than just make and receive telephone calls. Modern devices are capable of sending and receiving text messages, surfing the Internet, listening to music, and watching videos. As the functionality of these devices increases, these devices become more and more important to their users.

But the increased functionality of these devices has other consequences. More and more, children use their devices to exchange text messages. This requires additional vigilance on the part of teachers. If children were to exchange text messages during an examination, the children could cheat in a way that is harder to detect. And with the use of these devices for entertainment, children could be paying more attention to the entertainment functionality of their devices than to their education.

A need remains for a way to address these and other problems associated with the prior art.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 shows a home including a telephone call processor to process telephone calls according to a first embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 shows details of the telephone call processor of FIG. 1.

FIGS. 3-4 show details of the database of processing rules of FIG. 2.

FIG. 5 shows details of the telephone call processor of FIG. 1, according to a second embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 6 shows details of the mapping database of FIG. 5.

FIG. 7 shows details of the database of processing rules of FIG. 5.

FIG. 8 shows a telephone company including a telephone call processor to process telephone calls according to a third embodiment of the invention.

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FIG. 9 shows the telephone call processor of FIGS. 1 and 8 e-mailing a user about a telephone call.

FIG. 10 shows a flowchart of a procedure for processing a telephone call according to embodiments of the invention.

FIG. 11 shows a device designed to permit third party control of device functionality, according to an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 12 shows a user of the device of FIG. 11 requesting to execute an instance of a function.

FIG. 13 shows the authorizer of FIG. 11 determining whether the requested function instance is authorized by a third party.

FIG. 14 shows a set of functions with rules established by a third party to determine whether a requested function of the device of FIG. 11 is authorized by a third party.

FIG. 15 shows the executor of FIG. 11 permitting or blocking the function instance based on the authorizer of FIG. 11.

FIG. 16 shows the mobile device of FIG. 11 provided to the user by a service provider, the service provider storing the set of functions with rules of FIG. 14.

FIGS. 17A-17B show a flowchart of a procedure for the device of FIG. 11 to process, authorize, and execute a function instance, as controlled by a third party.

FIG. 18 shows a flowchart of a procedure for a third party to authorize an instance of a function of the device of FIG. 11, according to a first embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 19 shows a flowchart of a procedure for a third party to authorize an instance of a function of the device of FIG. 11, according to a second embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 20 shows a flowchart of a procedure for the device of FIG. 11 to be programmed with rules, according to embodiments of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 shows a home including a telephone call processor to process telephone calls according to a first embodiment of the invention. In FIG. 1, home 105 is shown. Home 105 can be a person's home, but a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that home 105 could also be a business location. Indeed, home 105 can be any site equipped to receive telephone calls. Thus, home 105 could also be place where a person can use a cellular telephone (as discussed below). In this situation, there is no physical home 105, but rather an abstract concept of "home" being wherever the user is physically located.

Home 105 includes telephone 110. Telephone 110 can be any standard telephone as can be purchased or otherwise used today. Telephone 110 can also include an answering machine, either built in to telephone 110 or as a separate element.

Normally, telephone 110 is connected to jack 115, which leads back to the telephone company (not shown in FIG. 1). Instead, however, in one embodiment of the invention, telephone call processor 120 is situated between telephone 110 and jack 115. Telephone call processor 120 processes telephone calls, identifying who placed the telephone call, determining the time the telephone call was placed, and processing the telephone call according to records in the database. To that end, telephone call processor 120 can include a clock (not shown in FIG. 1) to determine the time the telephone call was placed. Alternatively, telephone call processor 120 can include a receiver (not shown in FIG. 1) to receive time information from an external source. For example, clock information can be received via a wired or wireless source.

A person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that telephone calls can be placed between persons in different time zones. For example, a person in New York, N.Y. can call

a person in Portland, Oreg. Because New York, N.Y. is in the Eastern time zone and Portland, Oreg. is in the Pacific time zone, there is a three hour time difference between the two parties to the telephone call. This begs the question as to what time should be used to determine “the time the telephone call was placed”. Because the person placing the telephone call clearly wants to talk with the other person, the party who is not necessarily prepared for the telephone call is the recipient. Therefore, in one embodiment of the invention, the “time the telephone call was placed” refers to the time the telephone call was placed, at the recipient’s location. But a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that alternative embodiments of the invention can refer to the time the telephone call was placed, at any desired location.

In terms of how telephone calls are processed, there are four basic alternatives. A telephone call can be blocked outright, which prevents the calling party from speaking with the user (or leaving a message for the user). A telephone call can be allowed to ring through to the called telephone number, which completes the call as though telephone call processor **120** were not part of the circuit. A telephone call can be forwarded to another telephone number: normally, this option would be used when the user expects to be able to receive calls at the other telephone number but not at the called telephone number: this is similar to traditional call forwarding (except that the forwarding is specific to the calling party and the time of the call, rather than general to all telephone calls at the called telephone number while call forwarding is in effect). Finally, a telephone call can be directed to a voicemail box, where the calling party can leave a message for the user.

When telephone call processor **120** is installed at the user’s home, as shown in FIG. 1, forwarding a call to another telephone number might not be as simple as an instruction at the telephone company to forward all calls to another telephone number. For example, the telephone company can perform a call forward operation at their switch, before the call would otherwise be completed. But by the time the telephone call has been received at telephone call processor **120** in FIG. 1, the telephone call has essentially been completed: the only question is whether the call will be answered or not. In this situation, forwarding a telephone call might not be handled at the telephone company’s switch. Instead, call forwarding can be mimicked using a second telephone line at home **105**. Telephone call processor **120** uses the second telephone line to place an outgoing call to the forwarding telephone number, then conferences the two telephone calls together, effectively simulating a forwarded telephone call. Depending on the options offered by the telephone company, it might even be possible for telephone call processor **120** to substitute the caller ID of the original caller for the user’s regular caller ID, so that the user knows whose call is being forwarded.

Although FIG. 1 shows telephone **110** and telephone call processor **120** as separate objects, a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that these two objects can be combined into a single physical unit. That is, telephone **110** can include the necessary equipment and/or programming to include the functionality of telephone call processor **120**.

As mentioned above, embodiments of the invention can include cellular telephones. Modern cellular telephones, such as the Apple® iPhone® mobile digital device and the Palm® Pre™ smartphone among others, are, in fact, much more than just cellular telephones. (Apple and iPhone are registered trademarks of Apple Inc.; Palm and Pre are trademarks of Palm, Inc.) These devices can be viewed as small form-factor computers, having built-in operating systems, and allowing end-users to add new capabilities in the form of installable applications. As such, telephone call processor **120** can be

implemented as software that can be installed on the hardware built into such devices. Such application installation would give these devices the functionality of embodiments of the claimed invention.

FIG. 2 shows details of the telephone call processor of FIG. 1. In FIG. 2, telephone call processor **120** includes receiver **205**, identifier **210**, database **215**, and processor **220**. Receiver **210** receives the telephone call. Identifier **210** identifies the calling party. For example, identifier **210** can access the identity of the calling party from caller identification information sent with the telephone call.

Once the calling party is identified, telephone call processor **120** can access database **215** to determine what rules apply to this telephone call. Once the rules have been identified, processor **220** can then process the telephone call according to the identified rules.

From the above description, it should be apparent that the rules in database **215** control how embodiments of the invention work. FIGS. 3-4 show details of the database of processing rules of FIG. 2. In FIG. 3, database **215** includes various rules that can be applied to various telephone numbers. For example, in FIG. 3, database **215** includes four different rules applicable to telephone number **303** (503-555-1234), one rule applicable to telephone number **306** (503-555-2345), and one rule applicable to telephone number **309** (503-555-3456). These various rules apply only to the indicated telephone numbers; thus, for example, the rules applicable to telephone number **303** (503-555-1205) do not apply to telephone number **309** (503-555-3456).

To give some more description, telephone number **303** (503-555-1205) includes four rules. The first rule specifies that telephone calls received at time interval **312** between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm Monday through Friday are to be allowed to ring through (instruction **315**). But calls from telephone number **303** (503-555-1205) at any other time (that is, in time interval **318** (between 12:00 am and 7:59 am Monday through Friday), time interval **321** (between 5:00 pm and 11:59 pm Monday through Friday), or time interval **324** (any time on Saturday or Sunday) are directed to the first voicemail account (instructions **327**, **330**, and **333**). These rules might be applicable to, say, a known business colleague with whom the user only wants to talk during business hours: at other hours, the telephone calls should be automatically directed to voicemail.

For telephone number **306** (503-555-2345), the user has only one rule: telephone calls from this telephone number should be blocked (instruction **336**), regardless of the day or time (time interval **339**).

For telephone number **309** (503-555-3456), the user has also one rule: between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm Monday through Friday (time interval **342**), the user wants telephone calls routed to a voicemail account. But in contrast to the rules applicable to telephone number **303** (503-555-1205), telephone calls from telephone number **309** (503-555-3456) are to be routed to a different voicemail box. This can occur, for example, if telephone number **309** (503-555-3456) is a telephone number of a known friend, who would understand that during business hours, the user does not want to spend time on personal matters.

In the above discussion, the term “rule” is intended to refer to the combination of the telephone number, the time interval, and the how calls from that telephone number during that time interval are to be processed. In contrast, the term “instruction” is intended to refer to the specific processing to apply to a particular telephone number during a particular time interval. Thus, for example, one rule in database **215** includes telephone number **303**, time interval **312**, and instruction **315**

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(and option **345**, as discussed below). Nevertheless, the terms “rule” and “instruction” are somewhat interchangeable, and a person of ordinary skill in the art will understand from context the meaning of the terms, even if the usage varies.

Although FIG. 3 shows time intervals **312**, **318**, **321**, **324**, **339**, and **342** in a textual manner, a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that database **215** can store these time intervals in any desired manner, and that the user can specify the time intervals in any desired manner. For example, the time intervals might be specified using checkboxes that cover the days on which the time intervals apply, and then offer the user to set the time range for those days using scroll wheels, or text boxes, or drop-down lists, or any other desired mechanism.

As described above, a user can have telephone calls automatically routed to voicemail. For example, instruction **348** specifies that calls from telephone number **309** (503-555-3456) are to be routed to a voicemail box during business hours, to avoid personal interruptions. A person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that there can be emergencies that would justify interrupting the user even during business hours. But, as described above, if all telephone calls from a particular calling party, regardless of the telephone number of the user called, would cause the telephone call to be processed in the same way, there would be no way for the calling party to inform the user about the emergency. For example, if the user has configured the system so that the same rules apply whether the user is called at his home telephone number, work telephone number, or cellular telephone number, there is no way for the calling party to avoid the user’s rules.

To address this situation, embodiments of the invention can include the ability for a caller to override the rules in database **215**, so as to handle emergencies. For example, the calling party could hear a message to the effect of “The party you have called has automatically directed your telephone call to voicemail at this time. If this is an emergency, please press 1 and your call will be connected immediately.” This gives the calling party the ability to circumvent the processing rules when necessary.

But a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that this override capability is not necessarily desirable for all telephone callers. For example, the user might not want business callers to be able to reach him at any hour of the day. Similarly, if there is a telephone number that the user wants to block, the user would hardly want the caller to be able to override the call block. (And even if the user might be willing to receive calls from a particular person at certain times, that does not mean the user would want that person to be able to reach the user at all times.) Thus, embodiments of the claimed invention let the user specify, as an option, whether or not the calling party can override the user’s instructions. If the user specifies that the calling party cannot override the instructions, then the instructions are followed without giving the calling party the opportunity to override the instructions. Overrides **345**, **351**, **354**, **357**, **360**, and **363** allow the user to specify whether the corresponding processing instructions can be overridden.

FIG. 3 shows how the user can specify instructions for specific telephone numbers. But if the user were to have to specify how all telephone calls are processed based on the calling party’s telephone number, the user would have to include a lot of rules. Furthermore, this structure would not allow the user to control calls for which the user has not specified a rule. For this reason, embodiments of the claimed invention permit the user to specify default rules: rules that are applied in case there are no specific rules associated with

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the calling party’s telephone number. (The default rules can also be applied in case the calling party blocks his caller ID.)

FIG. 4 shows various default rules defined by the user. For default telephone number **405**, the user has specified that, between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm Monday through Friday (time interval **410**), calls are to be directed to the user’s second voicemail account (instruction **415**). Between 12:00 am and 7:59 am Monday through Friday (time interval **420**), 5:00 pm and 11:59 pm Monday through Friday (time interval **425**), and all day Saturday and Sunday (time interval **430**), calls are to be allowed to ring through (instructions **435**, **440**, and **445**). Further, these rules cannot be overridden by the calling party (overrides **450**, **455**, **460**, and **465**).

The reader might notice that, for any particular telephone number, the time intervals specified in database **215** in FIGS. **3-4** do not overlap. By avoiding any overlap of time intervals, the telephone call processor can avoid the problem of what rule to apply when rules conflict. For example, if the user specifies one rule to route a call to a voicemail box during one time interval and a second rule to ring the call through during another time interval, the telephone call processor would not know which rule to apply if these time intervals overlap and a call comes in during this overlap period. Thus, in one embodiment of the invention, it is important that time intervals do not overlap, at least for any given calling party. Embodiments of the invention can include an instruction validator (not shown) to verify that, for any individual telephone number, the time intervals do not overlap. But a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that overlapping time intervals can be permitted: the telephone call processor can either apply any applicable rule arbitrarily, or can apply them in some sequence. (The converse situation, where there is a gap in time intervals, is not a problem, as default rules can be applied in that situation. And if there is a gap in the default rules as well, the telephone call can be allowed to ring through during the gap, as if the telephone call processor were not part of the circuit.)

In FIGS. **3-4**, it is assumed that the telephone number of the calling party can be identified. If a caller has set up his telephone system to block his caller ID, then his telephone calls will not include his caller ID. When such a call is received by the user, the user will not know who the calling party is, and so the system would not be able to process the telephone call. In one embodiment of the invention, telephone calls from blocked caller IDs are processed using the default rules (as shown in FIG. 4).

In another embodiment, the user can instruct his telephone company to prevent telephone calls from blocked caller IDs to be completed. When a telephone call is received from a calling party who has blocked his caller ID, the telephone company informs the calling party that the call cannot be completed unless the caller ID information is released. The calling party can then choose whether to release his caller ID information and complete the call (which would enable embodiments of the invention to process the telephone call), or refuse to release his caller ID information, in which case the call is terminated.

In combination, using default rules and the telephone company block of anonymous telephone calls gives users significant control over telephone call processing. But in a third embodiment, the system can include rules that apply specifically to anonymous telephone calls. Such rules would be similar to the default rules, except that these rules would apply specifically to telephone calls with blocked caller IDs.

FIGS. **3-4** also focus on using the telephone number of the calling party to locate the rules to apply. Embodiments of the invention can also use non-telephone number identifiers for

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the calling party in database **215**. For example, caller ID systems often provide a name for the calling party. Database **215** can include rules that process telephone calls based on the name of the calling party, rather than the telephone number of the calling party.

In yet another embodiment of the invention, the telephone call processor can include a database that internally maps telephone numbers to names for calling parties, rather than relying on the name provided as part of the caller ID service. In this manner, the user can provide specific names for particular calling parties independent of the name provided by the caller ID service. (Providing a mapping from a telephone number to a calling party name internally to the telephone call processor also avoids the complication that the name provided by the caller ID service can change outside of the control of the user, which would mean that the user's special rules for that calling party might no longer be applied after the name change.)

FIGS. **5-7** show an example of how embodiments of the invention can use non-telephone number identifiers to control the processing of the telephone call. In FIG. **5**, telephone call processor **120** also includes mapping database **505**. As discussed below with reference to FIG. **6**, mapping database **505** provides a way to map a telephone number of the calling party to an identifier other than the telephone number of the calling party. In this embodiment of the invention, identifier **210** can use both the telephone number of the calling party and mapping database **505** to identify the caller. But a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that if the caller ID is used as a non-telephone number identifier, then mapping database **505** can be omitted. In addition, although FIG. **5** shows database **215** and mapping database **505** as separate databases, a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that these databases can be combined.

FIG. **6** shows details of mapping database **505**. In FIG. **6**, the telephone numbers shown in the database of FIG. **3** are shown again, but this time mapped to non-telephone number identifiers. For example, database **505** shows telephone number **303** (503-555-1205) as mapped to caller name **605** ("John Doe"), and telephone numbers **309** (503-555-3456) and **610** (503-555-4567) as mapped to caller name **615** ("Mary Smith").

In addition to assigning a caller name to a telephone number, telephone numbers can also be assigned to groups. For example, database **505** shows telephone number **303** (503-555-1205) as mapped to caller group **620** ("Business"), telephone number **306** (503-555-2345) as mapped to caller group **625** ("Telemarketer"), and telephone numbers **309** (503-555-3456) and **610** (503-555-4567) as mapped to caller group **630** ("Personal").

It will be noted that there is no caller name associated with telephone number **306** (503-555-2345). The system is capable of operating without having either an associated caller name or caller group. For example, most users treat all telemarketers the same, regardless of who they are, nor do most users care about who the telemarketer is. Thus, no specific caller name is needed for a telemarketer. Similarly, the system can operate with a caller name but not caller group. (In fact, the system can operate with no identifier associated with a telephone number in mapping database **505**. In this situation, the entry in mapping database **505** would be unnecessary, and the system default rules, if any exist, would apply to the telephone number.)

Now, database **215** can be as represented as shown in FIG. **7**. Database **215** as shown in FIG. **7** is very similar to FIG. **3**. But instead of using the telephone number, database **215** locates instructions based on a non-telephone number identifier.

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For example, caller group **620** ("Business") includes the rules formerly associated with telephone number **303** (503-555-1205) in FIG. **3**. Similarly, caller group **625** ("Telemarketer") includes the rules formerly associated with telephone number **306** (503-555-2345) in FIG. **3**. And caller name **615** ("Mary Smith") includes the rules formerly associated with telephone number **309** (503-555-3456) in FIG. **3**.

There are some advantages to this embodiment of the invention. First, instead of each telephone number having specific instructions associated with it, telephone numbers can be grouped together in meaningful ways, and the instructions associated with the grouping. This simplifies rule management. For example, consider the rules associated with caller name **615** ("Mary Smith"). As shown in FIG. **6**, there are two telephone numbers associated with this caller. When telephone numbers are mapped directly to instructions, there would need to be instructions for each telephone number. But when telephone numbers are mapped to identifiers, which are in turn used to locate the instructions, there need be only one set of rules for the grouping. This simplifies database **215** as shown in FIG. **7**, which reduces the possibility of error in programming the rules.

In a similar manner, database **215** includes rules for caller group **620** ("Business"). These rules can be thought of as default rules to apply to all telephone calls from telephone numbers associated with caller group **620** ("Business"). Thus, instead of needing individual rules for each business telephone number, a single set of rules can be used.

Second, it will be noted that database **215** in FIG. **7** uses both caller group identifiers, such as caller groups **620** ("Business") and **625** ("Telemarketer"), and caller name identifiers, such as caller name **615** ("Mary Smith"). This means that rules can be defined for both groups of individuals and specific individuals. (A person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that including two identifiers is somewhat arbitrary, as any result achieved using two identifiers can also be achieved using only one identifier, at the potential cost of needing more rules in database **215**.) By defining rules for groups rather than for individual callers, rule management is simplified and the possibility of error is reduced.

For example, a user might have a number of callers that are considered business contacts, and a number of personal contacts. When the user goes on vacation, he might want to automatically direct all business calls to a business voicemail box, and automatically direct all personal calls to a personal voicemail box or forward all personal calls to a cellular telephone, depending on whether the user expects the cellular telephone to work. With rules associated with individual telephone numbers, changing the rules for vacation could be an onerous task. But if the user has defined rules associated with a group, the user need only change the group rules to change processing of telephone calls from all contacts in that group (subject to the caveat described below). Similarly, restoring the "normal" operation upon return from vacation is equally easy.

One issue that can arise in this embodiment of the invention is when there are rules associated with both the caller's name and group. For example, a user can define a caller group "Personal", which includes all personal contacts. This group can have default instructions to route telephone calls to voice-mail during business hours. But the user can also define instructions for his spouse, allowing calls from his spouse to connect immediately. Because the rules associated with the spouse's identifier are more specific than the rules for the group, rules associated with an individual caller name can override rules associated with the group. But when such

group rules are overridden by individual rules, one can see that the individual rules will continue to apply, even if the user changes the group rules.

Another advantage of this embodiment of the invention is that it simplifies adding new callers to the system. For example, assume that the user receives a telephone call from a person at 503-555-5678, a new calling telephone number to the user. After taking the call, it turns out that this telephone number belongs to a business contact (telephone number 503-555-5678 could be either a new business contact, or a new telephone number for an old business contact). The user can just add a new entry to mapping database 505, mapping telephone number 503-555-5678 to caller group "Business". Now the rules associated with the caller group "Business" will apply to calls from this number. (The user can also map telephone number 503-555-5678 to a caller name, if desired.)

In FIGS. 3-4 and 7, it will be noted that the user has specified that calls should be routed to different voicemail boxes. For example, instructions 327, 330, and 333 specify that the telephone calls should be routed to voicemail box 1, but instructions 348 and 415 specify that the telephone calls should be routed to voicemail box 2. In this manner, the user can manage multiple voicemail boxes for different purposes (e.g., voicemail box 1 might be the user's work voicemail, and voicemail box 2 might be the user's home voicemail), and automatically route different telephone calls to the different voicemail boxes.

As discussed above, most users have multiple telephone numbers at which they can receive calls. It is possible for the user to establish rules for processing telephone calls at each of these telephone numbers independently: this allows the user to specify different rules for how to process telephone calls at each telephone number. But if the user wants to apply the same rules for processing telephone calls at each of his possible telephone numbers, this creates a lot of repetition for the user, as he must construct the rules for each telephone number independently. In one embodiment of the invention, the user can specify a single set of rules for processing telephone calls, and have those rules apply to all telephone calls the user receives, regardless of the telephone number called by the calling party. This might involve copying (and synchronizing) rules between multiple telephone call processors, if different telephone call processors govern the operation of the different telephone numbers.

One small change would be made in this embodiment of the invention. When the rules are to be applied independent of the called telephone number, there can be confusion regarding what should happen when the instruction is to ring the call through or forward the telephone call to another telephone number. For example, if the call is allowed to ring through, the user is not going to know which telephone will ring. And forwarding the telephone call to the called number is essentially allowing the call to ring through. Thus, in this embodiment of the invention, there can be one instruction covering both possibilities (ring through and forward), specifying where the call should be routed (based on the time the call was placed). This result can be achieved by, for example, disabling the ring through option, and letting the forward option indicate where the call should ring, which might be the same telephone number as that called in the first place (in which case the system would operate as if it let the call ring through). A person of ordinary skill in the art will also recognize that it is possible to include both the ring through and forward options, applying their standard meaning.

FIG. 8 shows a telephone company including a telephone call processor to process telephone calls according to a second embodiment of the invention. But in contrast to FIG. 1,

where telephone call processor 120 is installed at the user's home, telephone call processor 120 is installed at telephone company 805, and implemented using the existing computer systems of telephone company 805. This embodiment has the advantage that call forwarding can be achieved using the services of the telephone company, rather than mimicking call forwarding in some manner.

Embodiments of the invention assume that there is some way for the user to modify the information in the telephone call processor. For example, the user might decide that the old telephone call processing rules do not serve him any more. Or, the user might have a new telephone number to which calls should be forwarded. Or, the user might have learned the telephone number of a new calling party for which the user wants to add a new rule. Or, the user might want to modify the mapping from telephone numbers to names for the calling party.

To modify the rules, telephone call processor 120 can be connected to a computer in some manner, so that the user can see and modify the rules. For example, telephone call processor 120 can be connected (either by wireline or wirelessly) to a user's computer. Or, telephone call processor 120 can be accessed via the world wide web using an interface (for example, if telephone call processor 120 is installed at the telephone company, or if installed at the user's home but connected to the world wide web). Or, telephone call processor 120 can support a detachable storage device where the processing rules can be stored; this detachable storage device can then be connected to a user's computer to modify the processing rules, after which the detachable storage device can be again connected to telephone call processor 120. Or, telephone call processor 120 can support a detachable storage device which can be connected to a computer to store updates to the processing rules; when the detachable storage device is then connected to telephone call processor 120, the processing rules stored in telephone call processor 120 can be updated accordingly. Examples of detachable storage devices can include flash drives (such as USB keys), memory sticks, memory cards, and other such devices. A person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize other examples of detachable storage devices that can be used to store the processing rules of telephone call processor 120. A person of ordinary skill in the art will also recognize other ways in which the rules used by telephone call processor 120 to process telephone calls can be modified.

A person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that embodiments of the invention work perfectly well even when the user has call waiting. Call waiting is a service whereby, if the user is talking on the telephone when a call comes in, the user is notified about the new telephone call (without call waiting, the calling party either hears a busy signal or is routed directly to a voicemail box). The user can choose to ignore the new telephone call, end the existing telephone call and switch to the new telephone call, put the existing telephone call on hold and temporarily switch to the new call, or conference the two calls together. In an embodiment of the invention, when the user has call waiting service, the system operates to process the call before attempting to connect the call (which could trigger call waiting). For example, if the user has established a rule that routes telephone calls from a caller directly to a voicemail box, the new telephone call can be routed directly to the user, without attempting to ring through (and thereby invoke call waiting). The only situations in which call waiting would occur using an embodiment of the invention would be if the rules governing the new telephone call instruct that the telephone call should ring through (that is, be connected to the user at the called number) or that

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the telephone call should be forwarded to another number. And in either of these situations, call waiting would occur only if the telephone where the call was directed is in use at the time the call is processed.

In one embodiment of the invention, once the call is processed, the telephone call processor **120** has completed its operation. But in another embodiment of the invention, the telephone call processor **120** can notify the user that something has happened. FIG. 9 demonstrates this situation.

In FIG. 9, telephone call processor **120** of FIGS. 1 and 8 is shown e-mailing user **905** about a telephone call. For example, telephone call processor **120** is shown as being connected to network **910**. Using the connection to network **910** and notifier **915**, telephone call processor **120** can send e-mail **920** to user **905**. E-mail **920** can include a notice that telephone call processor **120** has processed a telephone call, and can include information about the telephone call (for example, the identity of the calling party, or the time the call was received). In one embodiment, telephone call processor **120** only sends e-mail **920** to user **905** if the telephone call is blocked or sent to voicemail, on the premise that if the call is allowed to ring through or forwarded to another telephone number, the user will receive the telephone call immediately. But in another embodiment of the invention, telephone call processor **120** can notify user **905** about any processing of the telephone call, whether of a specific type of processing or for all types of processing.

In one embodiment of the invention, the user can specify a single e-mail address to which an e-mail notification is to be sent. But, just like telephone call processing, a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that the user can specify different e-mail addresses to which notification should be sent: the e-mail address used could then depend on the identity of the calling party (just like how the telephone call is processed).

If the rule applied to the telephone call included routing the telephone call to a voicemail, notifier **915** can include transcript generator **925**. Transcript generator **925** can generate a transcript of a voicemail message (assuming that telephone call processor **120** can retrieve the voicemail message from the voicemail box or intercept the voicemail message as it is being recorded). This transcript can be generated using voice recognition technology. By including a transcript, the user is not required to log in to the voicemail system to retrieve the message: the user can simply read the transcript of the voicemail message.

While FIG. 9 shows telephone call processor **120** notifying user **905** via e-mail **920**, a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that any desired form of notice can be used: the notice can take a written form or any other desired form. For example, the notice could be a short message service (SMS) message to a cellular telephone number, or an automated telephone call, or a tactile alert (such as the vibration of a cellular telephone or a pager), among other possibilities.

FIG. 10 shows a flowchart of a procedure for processing a telephone call according to embodiments of the invention. In FIG. 10, at block **1005**, the telephone call processor receives a telephone call. At block **1010**, the telephone call processor identifies the telephone number of the calling party. At block **1015**, the telephone call processor accesses a database of rules, to identify the rules applicable to the calling party. At block **1020**, the telephone call is processed according to the applicable rules, based on the time the call was placed, which involves applying the instruction applicable to the calling party at the time the call was placed.

At block **1025**, the telephone call processor can notify the user about the telephone call. As discussed above with refer-

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ence to FIG. 9, this notification can include an e-mail sent to the user at some e-mail address. If the notification includes an e-mail, and the telephone call was processed by routing the telephone call to a voicemail message, then at block **1030** the telephone call can include a transcript of the voicemail message. Blocks **1025** and **1030** are optional, as shown by dashed arrows **1035** and **1040**.

In the above discussion, the embodiments of the invention focus on how an individual user can control the operation of a telephone device, based on the identity of the calling party and the time the call is received. In these embodiments, the user of the telephone device can specify how to manage received calls. But what if a third party wants to control how the device operates? For example, what if a parent wants to prevent their child from being able to talk with their friends during school hours?

To extend the problem beyond the realm of telephone calls, today's mobile devices (be they personal digital assistants (PDAs), mobile digital devices, or any other form of mobile device) are capable of much more than placing and receiving telephone calls. For example, today's mobile devices typically have the capability to surf the Internet, play music and video clips, access television programs, and send and receive text messages, built in to the operating system of the device. And with the addition of third-party applications (also called third-party functions herein), which are limited only by the imagination, mobile devices can let users play games, look up recipe files, monitor the stock market, and untold other possibilities. These added functions can be very useful. But to a student in a classroom, these functions can be a huge distraction.

FIG. 11 shows a device designed to permit third party control of device functionality, according to an embodiment of the invention. In FIG. 11, device **1105** is shown as including various functions that are included as part of the operating system. These functions include telephone function **1110**, message function **1115**, entertainment function **1120**, and Internet function **1125**. Telephone function **1110** enables device **1105** to provide telephone functionality: the user can make and/or receive telephone calls over device **1110**. Message function **1115** provides messaging capability: the user can send and/or receive messages, be they text messages, short message service (SMS) messages, or e-mail messages, among other possibilities. Entertainment function **1120** provides entertainment to the user: for example, playing video (both stored locally on device **1105** and remotely accessed) and/or music clips: for example, entertainment function **1120** can enable the user to view telephone shows. And Internet function **1125** enables the user to view web sites on the Internet.

In addition to built-in functionality, device **1105** can have new functionality added to it. To support the addition of new functionality, device **1105** can include installation function **1130** to support the installation of a third-party functionality. This third-party functionality, shown in FIG. 11 as third-party function **1135**, and then be invoked by the user. Third-party function **1135** can be any desired function: for example, a function that supports travel planning, a utility that provides the user information about device **1105**, a networking function that allows the user to participate in social networking, a sports function that lets the user stay on top of the latest sports information, a navigation function that advises the user how to travel from point A to point B, or any other function. Depending upon the specific device the user has, there can be up to hundreds of thousands of functions the user can add the device.

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Because third-party function 1135 represents a functionality not provided on device 1105 as previously configured (barring the situation where third-party function 1135 had been installed and then deleted from device 1105), in one embodiment of the invention device 1105 can be configured to permit installation function 1130 to install third-party function 1135, but block its use until a third-party (overseeing the use of device 1105, not the developer of third-party function 1135) has configured device 1105 regarding when the use of third-party function 1135 is permitted and when the use is to be blocked. This third-party configuration can be determined by, for example, having device 1135 prompt for a code from the third-party prior to after third-party function 1135 is executed, and blocking execution of third-party function 1135 until the code is entered. Another possibility would be to inform the third-party that third-party function 1135 has been installed, and leave it to the third-party to do the configuration of the device at a convenient time. A person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize other ways in which a third-party can be advised of the need to configure control of third-party function 1135.

In an embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. 11, device 1105 has been equipped to control when and which functions can be invoked by the user. To support this control, device 1105 includes receiver 1140, authorizer 1145, executor 1150, clock 1155, and storage 1160. Receiver 1140 is responsible for receiving a user's request to perform some functionality of device 1105. The chosen functionality can be any functionality of device 1105, without limitation. Thus, for example, the chosen functionality could be to make or receive a telephone call using phone function 1110, to send or receive a message via messaging functionality 1115, to use entertainment function 1120, to access the Internet using Internet function 1125, to install a third-party function using installation function 1130, or to use third-party function 1130.

Authorizer 1145 is responsible for determining whether a third-party has authorized the user to invoke the chosen functionality at the current time. (The third party responsible for oversight of the user's operation of device 1105 will generally not be the same third-party responsible for the creation of third-party function 1135. A person of ordinary skill in the art will understand the interpretation of the words "third-party" in context in this manner.)

Although the above description describes authorizer 1145 as being responsible for determining whether the chosen functionality can be invoked "at the current time", a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that authorizer 1145 does not necessarily need to know current time on device 1105. For example, the third-party might have specified that a particular functionality is never to be invoked by the user. But the third-party might have specified that a particular functionality can be invoked at some times of the day, but not others. In this situation, authorizer 1145 needs to know the current time on device 1105. So that authorizer 1145 can determine the current time, device 1105 can include clock 1155. And so that authorizer 1145 can attempt to determine whether the third-party has authorized the user's chosen functionality, device 1105 can include storage 1160, which can store rules specifying what functionalities are authorized at what times. As will be discussed below with reference to FIG. 16, the rules specifying what functionalities are authorized at what times do not need to be stored on device 1105, and hence storage 1160 is optional.

Finally, assuming that the third party has authorized the user's invocation of the chosen functionality at the current time according to authorizer 1145, executor 1150 then executes the chosen functionality.

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FIG. 12, shows a user of the device of FIG. 11 requesting to execute an instance of a function. In FIG. 12, user 1210 is shown making request 1215. Request 1215 is a request that the device executes some functionality that user 1210 desires. Requests 1215 includes function instance 1220, specifying the chosen functionality the user desires to invoke. When user 1210 makes request 1215, requests 1215 is received by receiver 1140.

FIG. 13 shows the authorizer of FIG. 11 determining whether the requested function instance is authorized by a third party. In FIG. 13, authorizer 1145 is shown receiving request 1215, with function instance 1220. Authorizer 1145 can also receive time 1305, the current time on the user's device (as discussed above with reference to FIG. 11, authorizer 1145 might not need to know the current time on the device to determine whether the chosen functionality can be invoked by the user).

Authorizer 1145 also needs to know whether the third-party has authorized the functionality chosen by the user. As discussed above with reference to FIG. 11, in one embodiment of the invention the device can include storage 1160, storing rules programmed into it by the third-party that can specify which functionalities may be invoked at which times. In this embodiment, authorizer 1145 can access set of functions 1310 from within the internal storage of the device, and use set of functions 1310 to resolve whether the chosen functionality is authorized by the third-party at the current time.

In a second embodiment of the invention, set of rules 1310 can be stored, not on the user's device, but at the service provider that provides service to functionality to the user's device. Examples of such service providers in the United States include Sprint, Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile, among others, each of which offers different devices compatible with embodiments of the claimed invention. As part of the service provided by the service providers, service providers can include storage remote from the device for set of rules 1310. In this second embodiment of the invention, the device can use transmitter 1315 to request set of rules 1310 from the storage at the service provider, receiving set of rules 1310 via receiver 1320. (A person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that receiver 1320, needing to communicate with the service provider, transmits, for example, information over a cellular network, 3G network, 4G network, or other such networks, and is a different receiver from receiver 1140.) Alternatively, authorizer 1145 can transmit requests 1215 to the storage provider using transmitter 1315, and receive back the determination as to whether the user's chosen functionality is authorized to your receiver 1320.

In a third embodiment of the invention, set of rules 1310 is not stored anywhere, either on the user's device or at the service provider. Instead, transmitter 1315 transmits request 1215, along with function instance 1220, to the third-party, normally in real time (herein intended to mean that the third-party is notified in a sufficiently timely manner that the decision can be received by the device in a relatively short interval of time, preferably (although not mandatory), within 30 seconds of the function instance request). Then, the third-party can make a decision whether or not that particular function instance request is permitted, and responds accordingly; this response is received via receiver 1320, after which authorizer 1145 knows whether the requested function instance is authorized.

There are several ways in which the third-party can receive real-time notice of the requested function instance. For example, the third-party can be using a mobile device of his or her own, with an installed function that can monitor for such notifications. Then, when the mobile device receives the

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requested function instance notification, the third-party's mobile device can alert the third-party, giving him or her the details about the requested function instance, and allowing the third-party to authorize or block the requested function instance (for example, with two buttons on the screen of the mobile device).

Another way the third-party can be notified is with a call to telephone (a mobile device or a landline telephone), either via an automated system or a operator-initiated call. The third-party can then specify whether the requested function instance is authorized by pressing a particular key on the keypad of his or her mobile device or vocally authorizing (that is, saying "yes" to authorize the requested function instance, or "no" to block the requested function instance).

A third way in which the third-party can be notified of the requested function instance can be by sending an e-mail to a specified e-mail account, to which the third-party can send a reply message indicating whether the requested function instance is authorized or blocked. For example, the third-party can press a button in the e-mail message that indicates the desired response and generates an automatic response e-mail. Or, the third-party can reply with a word or phrase (e.g., "yes") indicating whether the requested function instance is authorized or blocked.

A person skilled in the art will recognize other ways in which the third-party can be notified about the requested function instance in real time and respond accordingly. A person skilled in the art will also recognize that the third-party can combine multiple different ways of being notified about the requested function instance. For example, the third-party can have a notification sent to both his or her computer and mobile device. Or, different embodiments of the invention can be combined: for example, during business hours the third-party can have the notification sent to his or her work computer, and outside those hours the third party can have the notification sent to his or her mobile device. For example, with reference to the embodiments of the invention described in FIG. 1250, the embodiments of the invention can be extended from just telephone calls to any type of information that can be received at the device, and the forward option as described above with reference to FIGS. 1-10 can include forwarding to another type of machine: for example, from a mobile device to a computer.

Regardless of how authorizer 1145 operates, the end result is indication 1325. Indication 1325 indicates whether the user is chosen functionality is authorized by the third-party. As will be discussed below with reference to FIG. 15, executor 1150 uses indication 1325 to determine whether or not to execute the user's chosen functionality.

FIG. 14 shows a set of rules established by a third party to determine whether a requested function of the device of FIG. 11 is authorized by a third party. In FIG. 14, various entries in set of rules 1310 are shown. Rules shown in FIG. 14 include a rule blocking receiving telephone calls (function 1405) between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm Monday through Friday (time interval 1410), making telephone calls (function 1415) between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm Monday through Friday (time interval 1420), receiving messages (function 1425) between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm Monday through Friday (time interval 1430), sending messages (function 1435) between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm Monday through Friday (time interval 1440), using the Internet (function 1445) between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm Monday through Friday (time interval 1450), and using third-party function 1 (function 1455) between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm Monday through Friday (time interval 1460). A person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that set of rules 1310 as shown in FIG. 14 is merely representative, and

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that other functions can be controlled using set of rules 1310, and that different functions can be blocked at different times. In addition, while FIG. 13 shows set of rules 1310 as a black list (blocking functions at particular times), a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that set of rules 1310 can also be implemented as a white list (specifying only the times during which functions can be used). Finally, although FIG. 13 shows all the functions as being blocked at the same time, a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that different functions can be blocked (or permitted) at different times.

In addition, set of rules 1310 can include overrides. As shown in FIG. 13, even though the device is blocked from receiving telephone calls between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm, this functionality block is overridden for telephone calls from the telephone numbers 503-555-9876, 503-555-8765, and 503-555-7654 (override 1465). For example, these telephone numbers might be numbers used by the device user's parents, who want to be able to reach their child in an emergency, even though the child's device is otherwise blocked from receiving telephone calls. Similarly, override 1470 permits the child to call his or her parents, override 1475 permits the child to receive e-mails from his or her parents, and override 1480 permits the child to send e-mails to his or her parents.

FIG. 15 shows the executor of FIG. 11 permitting or blocking the function instance based on the authorizer of FIG. 11. In FIG. 15, executor 1150 receives request 1215, with function instance 1220, and indication 1325. Based on indication 1325, executor 1150 either performs 1505 the requested function instance or does not perform 1510 the requested function instance.

As described above with reference to FIG. 13, some embodiments of the invention can have the set of rules stored at the service provider. FIG. 16 demonstrates some of this embodiment of the invention. In FIG. 16, service provider 1605 is shown as including storage 1610, which can store set of rules 1310 for device 1105, used by user 1210.

When set of rules 1310 is stored in the storage of device 1105, the obvious first thought is that set of rules 1310 is not configured until user 1210 receives device 1105 (or, more accurately, until the third-party configures device 1105 after receiving it from service provider 1605, and then giving device 1105 to user 1210). But there is an alternative embodiment. Service provider 1605 can pre-configure device 1105 with a default set of rules 1310: for example, blocking all functionality provided with device 1105 between 8:00 am and 4:59 pm. Then, the third-party only needs to minimally tweak set of rules 1310 to represent his or her specific modifications.

There are also additional possible embodiments of the invention when service provider 1605 stores set of rules 1310. Set of rules 1310 can be completely configured by the third-party as stored in storage 1610 by service provider 1605. Or set of rules 1310 can be pre-configured by service provider 1605, and then tweaked by the third-party. Further, set of rules 1310 can be configured or tweaked by the third-party either remotely within storage 1610 of service provider 1605, or locally on device 1105 and then transmitted to storage 1610 of service provider 1605 for storage.

Regardless of the specific structure of the system, the system can also include a log that records what function instances were requested, along with the decision reached as to whether or not to execute the function instance. This log (not shown) can enable the third-party to later review the use of device 1105: for example, to determine if set of rules 1310 requires updating to reflect a change in device 1105. This log can be stored either on device 1105 or externally (for example, in storage 1610 at service provider 1605).

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FIGS. 17A-17B show a flowchart of a procedure for the device of FIG. 11 to process, authorize, and execute a function instance, as controlled by a third party. In FIG. 17A, at block 1705, the device receives a request from a user to execute an instance of a function. At block 1710, the device determines whether a rule controls the execution of the function instance: that is, the device determines whether there are any limits on the execution of the function instance imposed by a third party. At decision point 1715, the device determines whether execution of the function instance is controlled by the third party. If execution of the function instance is controlled by a third party, then at block 1720 the device determines whether the third-party permits this function instance to be executed. As discussed above, this can include determining the current time on the device and seeing whether a rule on the device permits execution of the function instance at the current time.

At decision point 1725 (FIG. 17B), the device determines whether execution of the instance of the function is permitted by the third-party. If the third-party controls on the function permit execution of the current function instance, or if there are no limits imposed on the execution of the function instance by the third-party (in decision point 1715 on FIG. 17A), then at block 1730 the function instance is executed.

If the third-party has specified that the current function instance is not permitted at decision point 1725, then at decision point 1735 the device determines whether emergency permission exists for the function instance. As discussed above, the third-party might specify circumstances under which the rules prohibiting execution of the function instance can be overwritten: for example, for a child to place an emergency call to his or her parent. If emergency permission exists for the function instance, then at block 1740 the function instance is executed. Otherwise, at block 1745, the function instance is blocked.

The above description of FIGS. 17A-B describes all the operations as occurring within the device. But, as described above with reference to FIGS. 13 and 16, the rules controlling the execution of various functions on the device can be stored externally to the device: for example, a service provider. In addition, each requested function instance can be individually analyzed by the third-party (possibly in real time) to determine whether it is to be permitted. In these embodiments of the invention, the device cannot make its own determination as to whether the function instance is permitted, as the device does not have direct access to the rules controlling whether the function instance is permitted.

FIG. 18 shows a flowchart of a procedure for a third party to authorize an instance of a function of the device of FIG. 11, according to a first embodiment of the invention. In FIG. 18, details about block 1720 from FIG. 17A are shown (a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that other elements of FIG. 17A-B might also require modification). At block 1805, the third-party is notified about the requested function instance. This notification can occur in real time, although it is not required that the notification be in real time. At block 1810, the device receives in turn an indication from the third-party whether the requested function instance is permitted. Again, this return indication can be received in real time, although it is not required.

As discussed above with reference to FIG. 16, the system can also log requested function instances, along with whether the device blocked or permitted the requested function instance. Embodiments of the invention do not logging the requested function instance and the result of the device determination to be part of block 1805, for two reasons. First, if the device were only to log the requested function instance and

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not otherwise notify the third-party, then the user of the device could find himself or herself waiting days, weeks, or even longer (depending on how frequently the third-party reviews the log) for a decision whether or not to execute the function instance. Such a delay is generally impractical (although there might be situations in which this embodiment would be desirable). Second, if the log is to include the decision whether or not to execute the requested function instance, a decision is needed before the log is complete. But it might be useful to log the request and the decision as separate entries in the log.

FIG. 19 shows a flowchart of a procedure for a third party to authorize an instance of a function of the device of FIG. 11, according to a second embodiment of the invention. In FIG. 19, details about block 1720 from FIG. 17A are shown (a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that other elements of FIG. 17A-B might also require modification). At block 1905, the device determines a time for the requested function instance. At block 1910, the device accesses a set of rules regarding execution of the function from storage within the device. Alternatively, at block 1920, the device accesses a set of rules regarding execution of the function from external storage, such as at the storage provider. Either way, at block 1915, the device can determine if the requested function instance is permitted to be executed. This determination can be "automatic": that is, without needing to inquire directly from the third-party whether the specific requested function instance is permitted. The device can make the determination "automatically" based just on the time of the requested function instance on the device and the provided rules.

FIG. 20 shows a flowchart of a procedure for the device of FIG. 11 to be programmed with rules, according to embodiments of the invention. At block 2005, the third-party can directly programmed rules into the storage. Alternatively, at block 2010, a set of default rules can be provided by the service provider. Then, at block 2015, the third-party can modify these default rules to suit his or her specific needs. Block 2015 can be omitted, as shown by dashed line 2020.

As discussed above with reference to FIGS. 13 and 16, a set of rules can be stored either on the device or an external location, such as a service provider. FIG. 20 is applicable regardless of where a set of rules is actually stored. For example, if the set of rules is stored on the device, the third-party can directly programmed them into the device, or the service provider can pre-program a default set of rules in the device (e.g., before the device is sold/transferred to the user), which the third-party can modify. Alternatively, if the set of rules is stored externally, the third-party can directly program the set of rules into the external storage, or the service provider can pre-program a default set of rules into the storage, which the third-party can modify.

There are many different ways in which a set of rules can be programmed and/or modified. For example, the device might include software to directly edit the set of rules on the device, without need for any additional hardware (e.g., an external computer). Alternatively, the third-party might use an external computer coupled to the device to access and modify the set of rules. Or, the third-party might program the set of rules on an external computer, and then transfer the set of rules as a file to the device. A person of ordinary skill in the art can think of other ways in which the set of rules can be programmed and/or modified.

The following discussion is intended to provide a brief, general description of a suitable machine in which certain aspects of the invention may be implemented. Typically, the machine includes a system bus to which is attached processors, memory, e.g., random access memory (RAM), read-

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only memory (ROM), or other state preserving medium, storage devices, a video interface, and input/output interface ports. The machine may be controlled, at least in part, by input from conventional input devices, such as keyboards, mice, etc., as well as by directives received from another machine, interaction with a virtual reality (VR) environment, biometric feedback, or other input signal. As used herein, the term “machine” is intended to broadly encompass a single machine, or a system of communicatively coupled machines or devices operating together. Exemplary machines include computing devices such as personal computers, workstations, servers, portable computers, handheld devices, telephones, tablets, etc., as well as transportation devices, such as private or public transportation, e.g., automobiles, trains, cabs, etc.

The machine may include embedded controllers, such as programmable or non-programmable logic devices or arrays, Application Specific Integrated Circuits, embedded computers, smart cards, and the like. The machine may utilize one or more connections to one or more remote machines, such as through a network interface, modem, or other communicative coupling. Machines may be interconnected by way of a physical and/or logical network, such as an intranet, the Internet, local area networks, wide area networks, etc. One skilled in the art will appreciate that network communication may utilize various wired and/or wireless short range or long range carriers and protocols, including radio frequency (RF), satellite, microwave, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 810.11, Bluetooth, optical, infrared, cable, laser, etc.

The invention may be described by reference to or in conjunction with associated data including functions, procedures, data structures, application programs, etc. which when accessed by a machine results in the machine performing tasks or defining abstract data types or low-level hardware contexts. Associated data may be stored in, for example, the volatile and/or non-volatile memory, e.g., RAM, ROM, etc., or in other storage devices and their associated storage media, including hard-drives, floppy-disks, optical storage, tapes, flash memory, memory sticks, digital video disks, biological storage, etc. Associated data may be delivered over transmission environments, including the physical and/or logical network, in the form of packets, serial data, parallel data, propagated signals, etc., and may be used in a compressed or encrypted format. Associated data may be used in a distributed environment, and stored locally and/or remotely for machine access.

Having described and illustrated the principles of the invention with reference to illustrated embodiments, it will be recognized that the illustrated embodiments may be modified in arrangement and detail without departing from such principles. And, though the foregoing discussion has focused on particular embodiments, other configurations are contemplated. In particular, even though expressions such as “in one embodiment” or the like are used herein, these phrases are meant to generally reference embodiment possibilities, and are not intended to limit the invention to particular embodiment configurations. As used herein, these terms may reference the same or different embodiments that are combinable into other embodiments.

Consequently, in view of the wide variety of permutations to the embodiments described herein, this detailed description and accompanying material is intended to be illustrative only, and should not be taken as limiting the scope of the invention. What is claimed as the invention, therefore, is all such modifications as may come within the scope and spirit of the following claims and equivalents thereto.

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The invention claimed is:

1. A system, comprising:

a receiver to receive a first telephone call from a first telephone number at a time during a first time interval; an identifier to identify a first caller of said first telephone call;

a database configured to store a plurality of instructions, the plurality of instructions including, for at least said first caller of said first telephone call, a first instruction for said first time interval and a second instruction for a second time interval, wherein said first time interval and said second time interval do not overlap, and said first instruction and said second instruction are different, the plurality of instructions also including a first default instruction used to process telephone calls from a second caller of a second telephone call for which the database has no instruction; and

a processor to process said first telephone call according to the plurality of instructions stored in the database, wherein said first instruction and said second instruction are applicable to telephone calls received at a plurality of called telephone numbers.

2. The system according to claim 1, wherein said first instruction and said second instruction are each drawn from a set including: blocking said first telephone call, routing said first telephone call to a voicemail box, forwarding said first telephone call to a second telephone number, and ringing a telephone assigned to a called number of said first telephone call.

3. The system according to claim 1, wherein said first default instruction includes an override option to control whether said second caller is able to override whether the processor processes said second telephone call according to the database.

4. The system according to claim 1, wherein said first default instruction is drawn from a set including: blocking said second telephone call, routing said second telephone call to a voicemail box, forwarding said second telephone call to a second telephone number, and ringing a telephone assigned to a called number of said second telephone call.

5. The system according to claim 1, wherein:

the system further comprises at least a mapping from a first calling telephone number of said first telephone call to an identifier other than said first calling telephone number; and

said first instruction and said second instruction identify said first caller using said identifier other than said first calling telephone number.

6. The system according to claim 1, wherein the database is configured to store:

for said first caller of said first telephone call, said first instruction is operative to route said first telephone call to a first voicemail box; and

for a third caller of a third telephone call, a third instruction operative to route said third telephone call to a second voicemail box.

7. The system according to claim 1, wherein the database is capable of storing:

for said first caller of said first telephone call, said first instruction is operative to forward said first telephone call to a second telephone number; and

for a third caller of a third telephone call, a third instruction is operative to forward said third telephone call to a third telephone number.

8. A method, comprising:

receiving a first telephone call at a time during a first time interval;

identifying a first caller of the first telephone call;

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accessing a database configured to store a plurality of instructions, the plurality of instructions including, for at least the first caller, a first instruction for the first time interval and a second instruction for a second time interval, wherein the first time interval and the second time interval do not overlap, and the first instruction and the second instruction are different, the plurality of instructions also including a first default instruction used to process telephone calls from a second caller of a second telephone call for which the database has no instruction; and

processing the first telephone call according to the plurality of instructions stored in the database, wherein said first instruction and said second instruction are applicable to telephone calls received at a plurality of called telephone numbers.

9. The method according to claim 8, wherein accessing a database includes accessing the database, the first instruction and the second instruction each drawn from a set including: blocking the first telephone call, routing the first telephone call to a voicemail box, forwarding the first telephone call to a second telephone number, and ringing a telephone at a called number of the first telephone call.

10. The method according to claim 8, wherein, if an applied default instruction indicates that the second caller of the second telephone call is able to override the applied instruction, offering to the second caller the option of overriding the applied default instruction and ringing a telephone at a called number of the second telephone call.

11. The method according to claim 8, wherein accessing a database includes accessing the database the first default instruction drawn from a set including: blocking said second telephone call, routing said second telephone call to a voicemail box, forwarding said second telephone call to a second telephone number, and ringing a telephone assigned to a called number of said second telephone call.

12. The method according to claim 8, wherein if the first instruction includes routing the first telephone call to the voicemail box, processing the telephone call according to the database of processing instructions includes routing the first telephone call to one of a plurality of voicemail boxes based on the first caller.

13. The method according to claim 8, wherein if the first instruction includes forwarding the first telephone call to a second telephone number, processing the telephone call according to the database of processing instructions includes forwarding the first telephone call to one of a plurality of second telephone numbers based on the first caller.

14. The method according to claim 8, wherein: identifying a first caller of the first telephone call includes: identifying a first calling telephone number of the first telephone call; and

mapping the first calling telephone number of the first telephone call to an identifier other than the first calling telephone number; and

processing the telephone call according to the database of processing instructions includes processing the telephone call according to the database of processing instructions based on the identifier other than the first calling telephone number.

15. An article, comprising a non-transitory tangible storage medium, said non-transitory tangible storage medium having stored thereon instructions that, when executed by a machine, result in:

receiving a first telephone call at a time during a first time interval;

identifying a first caller of the first telephone call;

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accessing a database configured to store a plurality of instructions, the plurality of instructions including, for at least the first caller, a first instruction for the first time interval and a second instruction for a second time interval, wherein the first time interval and the second time interval do not overlap, and the first instruction and the second instruction are different, the plurality of instructions also including a first default instruction used to process telephone calls from a second caller of a second telephone call for which the database has no instruction; and

processing the first telephone call according to the plurality of instructions stored in the database,

wherein said first instruction and said second instruction are applicable to telephone calls received at a plurality of called telephone numbers.

16. The article according to claim 15, wherein accessing a database includes accessing the database, the first instruction and the second instruction each drawn from a set including: blocking the first telephone call, routing the first telephone call to a voicemail box, forwarding the first telephone call to a second telephone number, and ringing a telephone at a called number of the first telephone call.

17. The article according to claim 15, wherein: identifying a first caller of the first telephone call includes: identifying a first calling telephone number of the first telephone call; and

mapping the first calling telephone number of the first telephone call to an identifier other than the first calling telephone number; and

processing the telephone call according to the database of processing instructions includes processing the telephone call according to the database of processing instructions based on the identifier other than the first calling telephone number.

18. The article according to claim 15, wherein if the first instruction includes routing the first telephone call to the voicemail box, processing the telephone call according to the database of processing instructions includes routing the first telephone call to one of a plurality of voicemail boxes based on the first caller.

19. The article according to claim 15, wherein if the first instruction includes forwarding the first telephone call to a second telephone number, processing the telephone call according to the database of processing instructions includes forwarding the first telephone call to one of a plurality of second telephone numbers based on the first caller.

20. The article according to claim 15, wherein, if an applied default instruction indicates that the second caller of the second telephone call is able to override the applied instruction, offering to the second caller the option of overriding the applied default instruction and ringing a telephone at a called number of the second telephone call.

21. The article according to claim 15, wherein accessing a database includes accessing the database, the first default instruction used to process telephone calls from the second caller of the second telephone call for which the database does not include an instruction, the first default instruction drawn from a set including: blocking said second telephone call, routing said second telephone call to a voicemail box, forwarding said second telephone call to a second telephone number, and ringing a telephone assigned to a called number of said second telephone call.